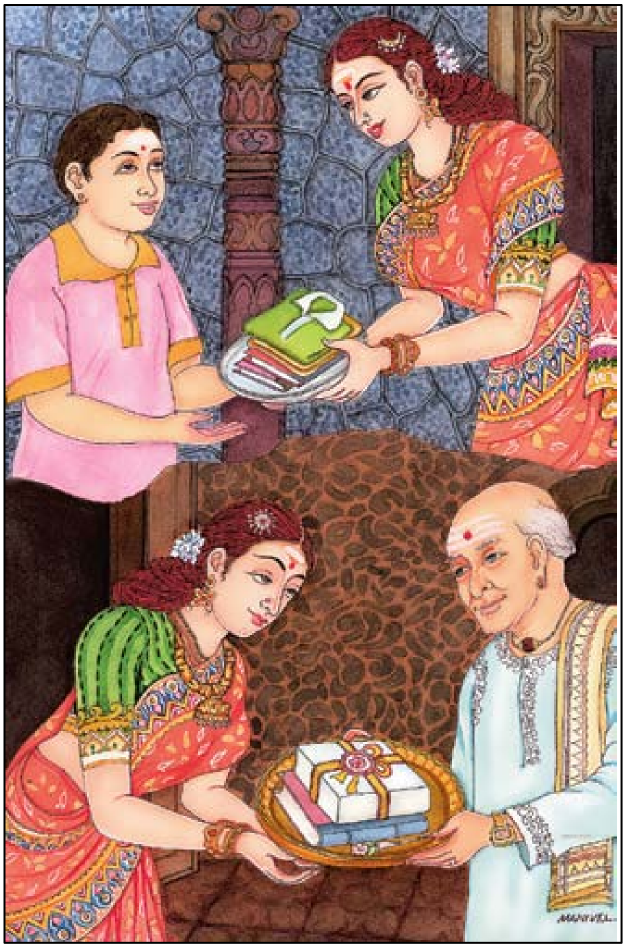
Hindu Ideals and Idols for Students

A TEXTBOOK FOR INTRODUCING HINDU VALUES



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Note to Parents and Students

This book is intended as a reference guide. Therefore, it should not be thrown away. Rather, it should be preserved for future reference on what Hindu Dharma says about various virtues and vices. Should you not need this book any longer, please give it to a friend or a family member.

Studying about different virtues and vices can be a very dry subject. Therefore, each chapter tries to incorporate interesting stories from the Hindu traditions from all over the world, and also a few examples and stories from the Greek and American traditions. The author believes that reading about how great Rishis, Sants, Bhaktas, Kings and even otherwise ordinary Hindus have practiced these values is more illuminating and inspiring than reading about them in a purely theoretical fashion.

The difference of this book from other similar books likes in the fact that the latter are often biased towards the Samnyasa and Vedantic perspective of these values and vices, and therefore present a too idealistic version of the reality. This idealistic version can be practiced only and Sages, but the real life for us ordinary Hindus is much more complex and different. Therefore, an attempt has been made to look at issues from various angles, and discuss various compromises that we have to make from a practical (and yet an ethical) perspective. The author has also tried to make the book all-inclusive so that it does not favor any one tradition of Hindus over the others. Omission of certain stories or values does not mean that the author does not like them or consider them as important. It only means that these are most likely covered in the other books of this textbook series because they fit there better. This particular book is meant for students in the 6th or the 7th grades.

Note for the Teachers

This book has more than twice as much material that can be covered in a course of 1 year with 30 classes that are 1 hour long. Moreover, several sections are too dense and complex, and are meant for future reference, when the student is older (or they are meant for the parents). The teacher should therefore use the stories incorporated as the chief vehicle for discussing these values. Class discussions on the complexities involved, and modern applications of these values must be focused upon as well.

It is also beneficial to study the values and vices in pairs or groups. For E.g., Greed should be studied with contentment and 'non-hoarding.' Ahimsa should be studied with Peacefulness, Compassion and Gentleness. Do not dwell upon the minutiae in the chapters in your classroom. An annual project on research on names listed in Appendix I may be given to students individually, in pairs or in threes. The student should create 2 of the following three deliverables to present their research: Term Paper, Powerpoint slides, or a Poster (or Trifold) presentation. Any contemporary events highlighting the contents of any chapter should also be brought up in the classroom for enrichment.

SECTION I

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR HUMAN BODY

1. The Human Being – Pinnacle of Bhagavān's Creation

1.1 The Diversity of Bhagavān's Creation

Just as modern science says, Hindu Dharma also teaches us that the Universe is vast and we can never measure its true size! Although we know life to exist only on earth at present, science does not rule out the possibility that there are different life forms on other planets.

Even on our planet earth, there exist almost 2 million species of plants and animals. Human beings are the most superior of all life forms on earth. Indeed, we are fortunate that Bhagavān gave us a human body and mind. Hindu scriptures teach that there are actually 8.4 million life-forms, and human being is somewhere is not at the top of these life-forms. Above us humans, there exist the Devatās and many other living forms that are more advanced – physically, mentally and spiritually. These higher beings exist on earth and in other parts of the universe, but we cannot see them unless we become advanced ourselves in Dharma and spirituality.

1.2 Humans and Other Living Beings:

We share the following common traits with animals and plants:

1. We consume food, water and air.
2. We reproduce.
3. We excrete
4. We sleep
5. We try to preserve our body and our lives from attacks or from damage by the environment. We desire security and shelter.

In addition to these common features, every creature also has a special nature from birth that distinguishes it from other creatures. E.g., a tiger will not become a vegetarian, a monkey cannot read a

book, a tree cannot talk and so on. In Sanskrit, the language in which Hindu scriptures are written, the word for human being is 'manushya', or a creature that can 'think and make choices."

1.3 The Uniqueness of Human Beings:

The human being is very unique in one respect with regard to all the plants and animals. Due to our larger brain and our special anatomical features (e.g. ability to walk on two feet, which leaves our two hands free to do other things), we are much more advanced physically as well as mentally than all the other living beings. All the other creatures are literally trapped in their inborn nature and cannot behave much differently from what they are supposed to do by their nature.

But unlike animals and plants, the human being has the ability

1. To think in more complex ways,
2. To make choices,
3. To remember a lot of more things than animals can,
4. And to use our intelligence to make and controls tools and machines.

These special abilities make us much more powerful than other living beings, and enable us to control and change the environment to our liking. But this unique power can be both a blessing as well as a curse. A person like Hitler who uses his mind in devious ways can kill millions of other human beings. In fact, humans are the only species that has the ability to make themselves extinct through the use of nuclear weapons. At the same time, we can use our advanced brain constructively to save thousands of starving animals and human beings in another part of the world where a famine has occurred. Can animals or plants do that?

Our unique powers have placed us at the top of the food pyramid. We have changed the face of our earth in an irreversible way. In fact, we have sent satellites and space-crafts to the moon and many other cosmic bodies successfully.

1.4 The Law of the Jungle versus the Rule of Dharma

The law of the jungle is "Might is Right." He who is mightier eats and kills the weaker. Similarly, in a pond, the bigger fish eats the smaller ones. In the Hindu tradition, it is said that several thousands of years back, the great Rishi Manu was pained to observe that the weak were always oppressed by those who were physically stronger. Therefore, he compiled the rules of Dharma, so that men are considered great not by their physical strength alone, but by whether they adhere to laws, rules and values or not. This contribution of Maharshi Manu resulted in the protection of the weak, because now they had the weapon of Dharma to defend themselves.

Let us consider these two examples to illustrate the difference between Dharma and the Law of the Jungle (called 'matsyanyāya', or the law of the fish in Hindu tradition):[1]

1. A hungry lion sees some deer grazing at a close distance. He decides to pounce on the deer, kill it and eat its meat. The lion does not think, "The deer is innocent. It has not hurt me. So let me not kill it, and eat plants instead." If the lion is hungry, it will hunt and kill. The lion really has no choice, and his hunger forces him to kill the deer, till he becomes hungry again, and has to hunt another animal.
2. When the lion is done eating, there is still a large portion of the carcass of the dear left that is uneaten. But the lion is not interested, and he walks away. The lion does not think, "Let me not waste any food. I will freeze it in the refrigerator." Nearby, a jackal sees the lion walk away from the half eaten corpse of the deer. "Food for me," thinks the jackal, and he walks to the carcass and starts eating it. The jackal does not think, "The deer does not belong to me because it was killed by the lion. Let me take the lion's permission before eating it." The jackal just starts chewing bits off the carcass as soon as the lion has walked away to a safe distance.

These examples also illustrate the basic difference between animals and human beings. Animals are compelled by their nature to act in certain ways, whereas a human being can make rational and ethical choices by reasoning in his mind. Animals are compelled to follow the Law of the Jungle, or the Fish Rule ('Big fish eat small fish') but we human beings have the choice of living under the Rule of Dharma.

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[1] Page 5, in Purnavidya, vol. 6

1.5 The Law of Karma: A Burden or an Opportunity?

Because the animals cannot make any choices whereas we humans can, the animals are not said to be indulging in 'good karma' when they do things that are 'good' in our opinion. For example, we never say that, "a cow has better karma than a lion, because the cow eats only grass whereas the lion hunts and kills his prey." The point is that because Bhagavān has gifted human beings the ability to use our intellect and make choices, He also judges our Karma as good or bad, whereas he does not make any such judgments for animals.

Instead of seeing this as a burden, we should see this as an opportunity that we have been provided. Why? Because of all the creatures on this earth, we alone can make the right choices and advance spiritually to come closer to Bhagavān.

1.6 Are we wasting our Human Life?

Therefore, we should always thank Bhagavān for giving us the body and mind of a human being. The human birth is a unique opportunity given to us by Him to do good deeds and free our Ātmā or soul so that it becomes one with Bhagavān. But we think instead, "We have only one life, so let us enjoy. Let us eat and drink, and wear good clothes. Let us listen to music all the time. Let me earn money even if I have to cheat others." The following story illustrates how we waste our lives:

> Once, a fisherman was taking a walk on the beach late in the night. He saw a bunch of debris from the last tide on the sand. One of the items looked like a pouch. He thought that the pouch must have been washed ashore from a ship. When he opened a pouch, he found that it was full of stones.
>
> The fisherman sat on the beach, and started throwing the stones at leisure into the waves. He enjoyed the 'plup' sound as the stone crashed into the water. Soon, it was sunrise, and there was light. As the fisherman put his hand into the pouch to pluck out one of the last stones, he realized that the stones were in fact large diamonds.
>
> Apparently, he had wasted most of the diamonds by throwing them into the water. Most of us are like the fisherman. We do not realize, in the darkness of our ignorance,

> that we are wasting our precious assets like good health and young age to enjoy trivial pleasures like that plup sound. Only if we had the light of wisdom, we would not waste even a moment in spending our life wisely, and in taking care of our assets.[2]

If we waste our human life in chasing only pleasures of electronic games, diamonds, clothes, cars, mansions etc., then perhaps we do not deserve to be in our human body at all. Therefore, people who are totally materialistic and do not try to understand the nature of the soul and Bhagavān are deprived of their human body and they are reborn as animals or as plants. The following story illustrates how we can sometimes misuse our precious gift from Bhagavān.

> "A Raja presented a rich Kashmiri shawl to a foolish Pandit. The Pandit had no idea of the value of the shawl. He at once wiped his nose and feet with the shawl. Irate at such stupidity, the Raja ordered that the shawl be taken away from the Pandit who did not know how to use it. And his peon snatched it away from the Pandit.
>
> Similarly, this precious human birth has been bestowed upon us as a great gift by God. But the foolish man wastes it on woman, gold and fame. Death soon comes and snatches away this gift of God, grossly misused by man.
>
> O man, utilize this precious human birth in Japa, study of scriptures, selfless service and meditation. Realize the Self and be free."[3]

The Mahābhārata therefore warns us –

> *"A human being should not degrade himself to be reborn into a lower species by indulging in sensual pleasures alone, because the human body, even if that of a chandāla (an uncultured and barbarian person) is very difficult to obtain. The Human form is the best that one can hope to obtain because in this form, the soul can uplift itself by performance of pious deeds."* **Mahabharata 12.286.31-32**

The Hindu scriptures even explain what happens to people who misuse their human body. For example, someone who just wants to have a lot of children may be reborn as a rabbit or pigeon – animals that breed very fast!

1.7 The Purpose of our Human Birth:

Hindu Dharma teaches us that it is not wrong to enjoy life. But we should live a balanced life in which we spend a good chunk of our efforts and resources to do good deeds and also make spiritual progress. But what do most of us do? We spend practically all our time in the pursuit of trivial things that do not last forever – like the latest car or electronic gadget. If only we were to spend a little more time in spiritual matters, the results would be so much better. The following story illustrates very well our priorities are so mixed up in life -

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[2] Parable of Swami Atmashraddhananda, "Life is Precious," in *"Life is a Gift, Living is an Art"* Chinmaya Mission West (Piercy, California), 2009

[3] Swami Sivananda. 2004. Parables of Swami Sivananda. The Divine Life Society. Tehri-Garhwal (Uttaranchal), India; page 28

“A father wanted to test the intelligence of his two sons. He allotted to each of them the task of looking after a mango tree, promising to reward the boy whose tree yielded the best fruit in abundance. The foolish boy discovered that the leaves were withering off and that flowers were coming up at the end of the branches. Promptly he went up the tree and carefully watered every leaf. The leaves withered still more and the tree eventually died. The wise boy, on the other hand, went on water the root; the tree was green and healthy and yielded delicious fruits in abundance.

Similarly, God gives human birth to man in order to test the evolution of his intelligence. The foolish man, eager to get the reward of Eternal peace and Immortality, seeks to pay attention to the satisfaction of his sense-cravings, and to the acquisition of worldly knowledge, for he thinks that this is the right way. He dies the miserable death of an ignorant man. The wise man, on the contrary, devotes himself to the contemplation of God, the Root of all Creation, and thus obtains all the wealth and knowledge of the universe. God is well pleased with him and bestows upon him the reward of Immortality and Eternal Bliss.”[4]

We can lead a balanced life and make progress if we follow certain ideals and good values. The purpose of this book is to teach about the ethical and spiritual values and how we should practice in our everyday lives, and also the bad habits and evils that we ought to avoid. Moreover, as students, you have some special needs, duties and rights in your lives. The first section deals with some issues that are very important for students to understand to be successful in your lives.

1.8 The Values Taught by Hindu Scriptures and Sages

We Hindus believe in practicing many values in our daily lives. These values are taught in our holy books like the Bhagavad Gita,[5] and also by our Saints and Sages like Veda Vyāsa. They also teach us the evils that we should avoid. Most of these values are found in all religions like Christianity or Islam. We Hindus however practice them a little differently. We will see these differences when we learn about these values. We will learn about the science of the Mind and Sense Organs in the next chapter. This wisdom is taught mainly in the four Dharmic traditions of Hindu Dharma, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. There is very little of this science taught in the western religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism).

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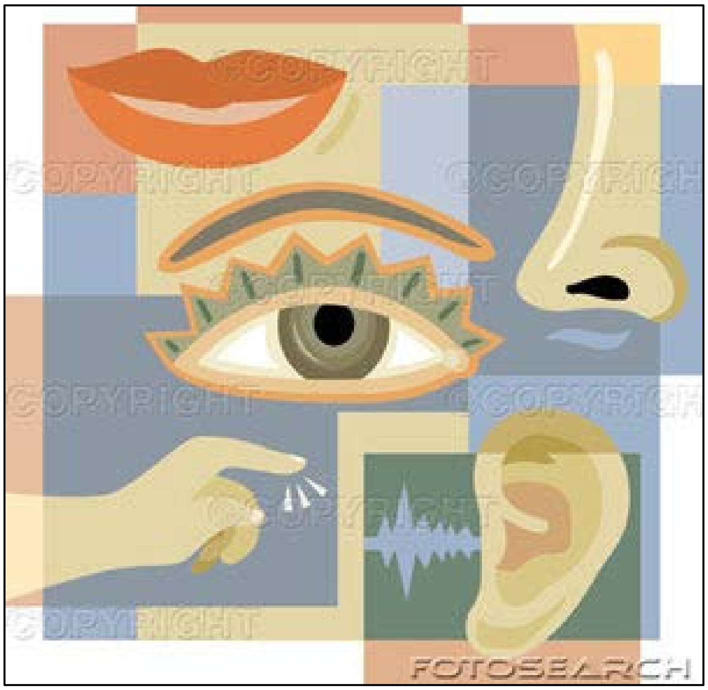
[4] Swami Sivananda (2004), p. 288

[5] In this book, we have chosen the values listed in the following verses of the Bhagavad Gita: chapter XII.12-20chapter XIII.8-12; chapter XVI.1-5

2. The Science of Mind and Sense Organs



We learned earlier that human beings are superior to all other creatures mentally as well as physically.

Even where we are inferior to other creatures (e.g., dogs have a superior smell of sense than we have), our mind is able to overcome these defects due to our superior intelligence.

The mind cannot act on its own. It has to act out through the sense organs that we have. Let us study a little more about how our mind acts through our sense organs.

2.1 What are Our Sense organs?

We have 10 senses called Indriyas. The Hindu scripture Manusmriti 2.90-92 defines them very clearly:

> Ears, skin, eyes, tongue (for taste), nose, anus, genitals, hands, feet and speech – these are the 10 sense organs. **Manusmriti 2.90**
>
> Of these, the first five are organs of 'perception or knowledge' and the last five are the organs of 'activity'. **Manusmriti 2.91**

2.2 The Mind as the Master Sense Organ

What controls these sense organs and what causes them to act? It is the mind that resides inside our brain. Manusmriti says-

> The mind is the eleventh sense organ which has the nature of both perception and activity. Through the conquest of the mind, all the 10 sense organs are conquered." **Manusmriti 2.92**

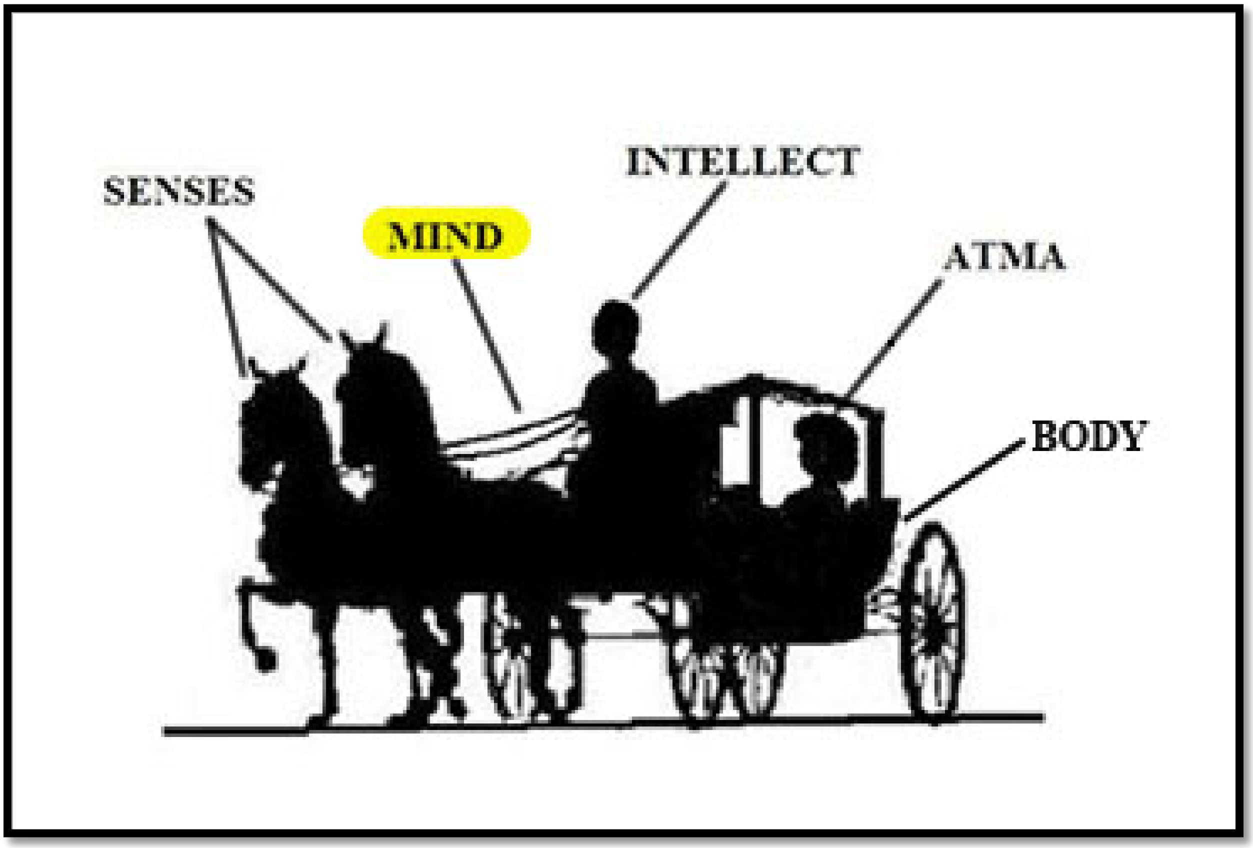
This verse explains the importance of the mind in relation to the sense organs. The mind is like the President and the organs are like its officials who act on its orders. But what if the President himself is weak and indisciplined, how can he control the officials? They will just do whatever they like, and lead the entire country to ruin. Therefore, it is very important to control or discipline our mind in order to

control our sense organs. If the mind itself is attached to bad habits and is week, it cannot control the senses. Therefore, to control our 10 sense organs, we should first control our mind. The Upanishads[6], which tell us about the science of our soul and the way to reach Bhagavān, say:

> The mind alone is the cause of bondage (separation from God) as well as freedom (being with God) of all humans. When it is attached to sense objects, the mind brings bondage. When detached from objects, it brings freedom. **Maitrayaniya Upanishad 4.6**

2.3 The Science of the Soul: Relationship of Sense Organs to the Soul

Well, if the mind should control the sense organs, then who should control the mind? The Katha Upanishad 1.3.3-9 explains the relationship of Indriyas with other things using the example of the chariot.



In this chariot,

- The chariot itself represents the body.
- The horses pulling the chariot represent the senses.

[6] There are several different Upanishads called by different names, like the 'Katha Upanishad', 'Isha Upanishad'. These books give a lot of information about the nature of our soul, of Bhagavān (called Brahman in these books), and ways of reaching Him. These books were compiled by our Rishis several thousand years ago. No other books in the whole world give this type of information in so much detail and with so much beauty as these scriptures of the Hindus.

- The owner of the chariot sitting inside the canopy is the Jīva-Atman.
- The charioteer that drives the chariot is the intellect.
- Reins that control the horses represent the mind.

We can convey the same information in the form of the table below:

#	Part of Chariot	Part of the Body
1	Chariot	Body (Sharīra)
2	Owner of chariot	soul (Jīva)
3	Charioteer	Intellect (Buddhi)
4	Reins	Mind (Manas)
5	Horses	Sense organs (Indriya)

How can the chariot owner (the soul) reach his destination which is Bhagavān? He can do so only if:

- His chariot is sturdy and stable (i.e., the body is fit and healthy)
- His charioteer is wise and capable (i.e., his intellect is pure and understanding is good)
- The reins are held tightly and correctly by the charioteer (i.e., the mind acts according to good intelligence and understanding)
- The horses are trained (i.e., they understand and follow the pull and tug of the reins) and are controlled well by the reins.

Conversely, the chariot owner will get thrown off the chariot, or he will never reach his goal (Bhagavān) If any of these things happen:

- The chariot breaks down (i.e., serious illness leading to death, or some physical disability).
- The chariot is foolish and incapable (i.e., we lack intelligence and understanding).
- The reins are not controlled well by the charioteer (i.e., the mind acts according to its whims, and not intelligently or according to any understanding)
- The horses go wherever they want, pulling the chariot in different directions (i.e., the eyes, nose, ears etc., keep pulling us to satisfy different cravings).

2.4 How Can We Reach our Goal?

Using the above example of the chariot, we can conclude that we have the best chances of reaching our goal if all the four things happen:

1. Sturdy Chariot (Body): We have a fit and a healthy body. This can be achieved by good eating habits, exercise and healthy lifestyle (including good sleeping habits). We will study some of these things in Section 2 of this book.
2. Good Charioteer: Good Intelligence and Understanding. This can be achieved by following good spiritual values in Section 5 of this book.
3. Strong and Disciplined Mind: Our mind should be strong and disciplined. This can be achieved through meditation (in Section 5 of this book), following good ethical values (in Section 4 of this book) and staying away from the six enemies and other evils (Section 3 of this book).
4. Sense Organs are Under Control: Our sense organs should be trained and under the control of a disciplined and a strong mind. Again, this achieved by having a disciplined mind and by enjoying things in moderation (Sections 2,3,4 of this book).

2.5 Example of Water-pot: How the Sense Organs 'drain' our intellect

Our saints give several useful examples of how obsession with pleasure of even one sense organ can lead to total ruin.

> The deer, elephant, the moth, the honey bee and the fish - these five are destroyed due to addiction to their five sense organs. [deer - ear (listens to sweet music and gets caught by the hunter), elephant - touch (caught through she-elephants), moth - eyes (it is attracted by the flame and burnt), honey bee - smell (attracted by fragrance of lotus and caught within), fish - taste (nibbles at the bait and gets caught) Even one of the sense organs is destructive. Then how can a man addicted to all five senses escape destruction?] **Garuda Purāṇa 2.12.18**

In Sanskrit, this is also explained by using the example of a 'pot'. Consider a pot filled with water. If we were to make a hole in it, the put would drain out soon. If we were to make several holes, the pot would drain out in an instant. Our senses are like the holes through which our intellect can drain out. Manusmriti says:

> If a man indulges excessively in the objects of enjoyment of even one of his sense organs, his intellect gets destroyed – just as a leather bag filled with water gets drained completely if it has even one hole. **Manusmriti 2.99**

Instead of projecting ourselves outwards through these openings (senses) and let ourselves get drained, we should plug our senses and reflect on the soul within us. Bhagavān Krishna says very beautifully in the Bhagavad Gita:

> *"When, like the tortoise which withdraws its limbs from all sides, a person withdraws his senses from the sense-objects, his wisdom becomes steady."* **Gita 2.58**

2.6 Vedic Prayers for the Mind

"May this mind of mine, which travels to great distances, which is the light of lights, the only source of wisdom; which wanders in all directions, whether I am awake or asleep – Resolve on what is noble. **Shukla Yajurveda 34.1**

May this mind of mine, by which assiduous and intellectual persons perform their God-assigned tasks in all social assemblies and congregations; the spirit that lies in all creatures – Resolve on what is noble. **Shukla Yajurveda 34.2**

May this mind of mine, which is the source of the highest knowledge, the source of wisdom, the source of the power of memory, the immortal flame of life within all living beings, without which no action whatever is possible – Resolve on what is noble. **Shukla Yajurveda 34.3**

May this mind of mine which guides men like a good charioteer who controls fleet-footed horses with the reigns, that which abides in the heart, most swift and vigorous – Resolve on what is noble. **Shukla Yajurveda 34.4**

May this mind of mine, that immortal spirit by which all the past and present world is comprehended; by which all the benevolent works are promoted and conducted through the seven sense organs – Resolve on what is noble. **Shukla Yajurveda 34.5**

May this mind of mine which imbibes and holds the teachings of the Vedas like the spokes in the nave of a chariot wheel; in which all the thoughts of the living world are intervowen – Resolve on what is noble. **Shukla Yajurveda 34.6**"[7]

2.7 Some Modern Temptations of Sense Organs to Avoid:

1. Drugs
2. Smoking
3. Alchohol
4. Too much sweets
5. Snuff
6. Beautiful clothing, shoes etc.
7. Psychedelic Music

Let us now study some good values that are meant specifically for students and teenagers.

[7] Pandit Satyakam Vidyalankar, pp. 110-111

PART II
GOOD VALUES FOR STUDENTS AND TEENAGERS

3. Duty of a Son or a Daughter towards Parents:

3.1 Parents are the Most Important People in Your Life

Before you get married, your parents should be the most important people in your life. As children, we should obey our parents, grandparents, teachers and other people older to us. We should listen to them. We should serve them and help them. We should make them proud with our good behavior. Hindu scriptures say-

> The father, mother, teacher, elder brother and one's provider- these five are considered as one's superiors. **Kūrma Purāṇa 2.12.32**
> He who desires prosperity should revere these superiors at all times by all means, even if he loses his life. **Kūrma Purāṇa** 2.12.33
> The son should be devoted to them and make their care his first priority. **Kūrma Purāṇa 2.12.34b**

In the Hindu scripture Taittiriya Upanishad, it is said that when the students are graduating from their college, their teacher gives them the following parting message:

> "May you be one for whom his mother is a Deva. May you be one for whom his father is a Deva. May you be one for whom a guest is a Deva. May you be one for whom his teacher is a Deva." **Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11**

The idea is that we should respect, serve and worship our parents, guests (this category includes the poor and needy people too) as well as our teachers even before we worship Bhagavān. This is a very unique teaching of the Hindu tradition. The western religions always place God before parents. Note that in the Hindu tradition, the mother is listed first, because she is the most respectable of all, more than even the father.

3.2 Why Must we Respect our Parents and Grandparents?

1. **To Repay our Debt to Them:** Because they give birth to us, endure great pains to raise us, educate us and get us settled in our lives. It is a lot due to their love and efforts that we become great in our lives. When we have our own children, our parents then play an important role in giving good values to our children as well. Therefore, when our parents are old and cannot take care of themselves, it is our duty to pay back their love, effort and blessings by serving them and honoring them in every way possible, even at the cost of great personal sacrifice. See the story of Shravanakumara below.

> No Deva can equal the mother, and no superior can equal one's father. Hence, no son can get relieved of the debt he owes to them. **Kūrma Purāṇa 2.12.36**

No person can repay his parents even in 100 years for all the troubles that the go through to give birth to him and raise him to adulthood. Therefore, always try to do whatever pleases your parents and your teacher, because only then does any religious worship done by you will bear any fruit. Manusmriti 2.227-228

2. **Serving them is a most Pious Act:** Serving our parents is for our own good, and it leads to great rewards. Conversely, not caring for them is bad Karma. No prayer etc. yields any fruit for the person who does not serve his parents and teachers. In the Mahabharata, there is a story of a Brahmana boy who leaves behind his elderly parents to advance spiritually. He acquires several spiritual powers, but discovers that even a butcher who had merely served his aged parents diligently was more advanced than him. The Brahmana boy learned the lesson that serving one's parents yields a much greater reward than abandoning them and pursuing your own selfish goals. Again, in contrast to the Hindu teachings, Jesus Christ in the Bible says that one must leave behind his parents and loved ones and not worry about them to demonstrate his love for God.

The lifespan, knowledge, glory and strength of him increase who pays respects to his elders regularly and serves them. **Manusmriti 2.121**

He who serves his parents and teachers truly respects all the teachings of the scriptures. And the person who disrespects them will never get the fruit of any worship. **Manusmriti 2.234**

Therefore, as long as they are alive, no one should devote himself to any other religious undertaking. Rather, he should continue to serve them with full diligence and do whatever pleases them and is beneficial to them. **Manusmriti 2.235**

In fact, by serving one's parents and teachers, a person fulfills all his major religious duties. Other religious acts like worshipping are minor, compared to serving these elders. **Manusmriti 2.237**

The son who pleases his parents by his good qualities acquires the fruit of all good virtues. **Kūrma Purāṇa 2.12.35**

Service to one's parents is the only essence of Dharma and it leads one to Moksha upon death. **Kūrma Purāṇa 2.12.38b**

3. **It is the Divine Command to us:** Bhagavān wants us to serve our parents, because they are His direct representatives for us on this earth. Bhagavān has taught us that by serving our parents, we actually worship Him. See the story of Pundalika below.

Bhagavān Vishnu said to Rishi Markandeya- "They who serve their parents, thinking of their father as the Lord of the Universe, and Mother as the holy River Ganga – they indeed are My best Bhaktas." **Nārada Purana 1.5.53**

4. **Bhagavān Himself has set an Example of Devotion to Parents**: In his various Avatāras, Bhagavān has Himself set an example for us on how we should respect our teachers and our parents. As Rama, He went to the forest for 14 years, so that his father could keep up a promise given to

step-mother. And even though Rama had to undergo 14 years of hardship due to the machinations of his step-mother, he never became angry with her and forgave her always. See the story of Ganesha and Karttikeya below.

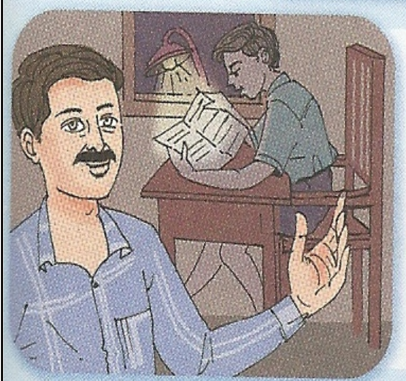
5. **Hindu Saints have set an example for us of Devotion to Parents**: Our saints have demonstrated their devotion to their parents in the lives. See the story of Shankaracharya below.

3.3 How Can we Serve our Parents?

The three sets of pictures below compare a good boy who is devoted to his mother, father and grandfather to a bad boy who does not.

Good Habits

He bows down to his father every morning and asks for his blessings.



He follows all of his father's instructions.

He looks after his father when he is tired or sick and helps his father with his work.

He makes his father proud by studying hard and getting good grades in school.

Bad Habits

He never listens to his father and will do the opposite of what his father tells him to do.

He does mischievous things that get his father angry.

He never helps his father with small work around the house.

He gets into fights with other children and his father has to break it up.

3.4 Hindu Cultural Norms in Treating our Parents and Grandparents:

There are many rules of etiquette that we Hindus follow for honoring and serving our parents.

1. We never address our parents by their names.
2. We never shout at them, even when we have an argument with them. We try not to talk back to them.

3. We never sit with our feet facing them. If we sit on a chair with our legs crossed, the foot on the top should face away from them.
4. We serve them food before filling our own plate.
5. When there are insufficient chairs in a room, we give the seat to them and stand ourselves.
6. We greet them with respect in the morning, and before going to bed.
7. We try to fulfill their requests and wishes to the best possible extent.
8. We do not smoke or drink in their presence (and better, not even in their absence).

3.5 Serving Parents in their Old Age

In traditional Hindu homes, elderly parents live with their children and grandchildren (or in their close proximity) till their very end. As a result, they pass their last days happily, playing with their grand-children, and being served lovingly by their children whom they had raised with great effort and pain in their own younger years. In modern times however, many young couples do not want to take care of their old parents.

The excuse of these young couples is that they do not have enough money to take care of their kids as well as their own parents. Sometimes, both the husband and wife are working and therefore they arrange to have their aged parents housed in an old age home where a full-time staff takes care of them. Unfortunately, some people do not want to have their elderly parents around because they do not want to see them or do not want their own little kids to see them suffering of illness of old age.

In old age, people like to live in a fixed location and are not very comfortable moving around. Unfortunately, modern life has become very mobile. Job changes force us to move from one town to another. In many cases, we do not change our job, but it is the job itself that moves to another city because the employer decided to move their plant or office to the new location. Moving with elderly parents to following a new job to a new location can be traumatic for both the couple and also their elderly parents who are staying with them. And yet, it is not right to just leave behind one's aged parents and live thousands of miles away from them.

Discussion Topics

1. What do you think are the benefits and drawbacks of elderly staying in old age homes versus staying with their own children? If your parents do live in an old age home, how can you make sure that you serve them and love them to the best possible extent? One example is filled out.

#	Advantages of Old Age Home Living	Drawbacks of Old Age Home Living
1	Professional medical care is available to them all the time.	Several old age homes are very badly managed and elders do not have a good time there.

2		
3		
4		

2. Your job moves to a new town that is 1000 miles away from the town where you have lived all your life with your parents. Your parents are too old to re-locate. How can you ensure that they are taken care off and loved even after you move out? One option of course is to decline the new job and continue staying close to your parents. What are some other options (two examples are filled out).

No.	**Steps taken by you to take care of your parents**
1	Talk to your siblings or other close relatives to see if they can live close to your parents.
2	Look for the first opportunity to return to the town where your parents live.
3	
4	
5	

Stories from the Hindu Tradition on the Devotion of Children to their Parents

Story: Shravaṇakumāra, the Devoted Son

Long, long ago, there lived a boy named Shravan Kumar. His parents were very old and blind. Shravan Kumar was a very devoted son and loved his parents a lot. Once, they expressed their desire to go on a pilgrimage to holy places. But, being very poor, they could not afford to travel on a cart driven by bullocks or on a chariot driven by horses. How could the little boy fulfill the wishes of his parents?

Guess what! Shravan was so intelligent and caring that he made them sit on two baskets and tied them to the ends of a stick. He then carried them on his shoulder and walked on foot towards Kashi – a holy place for Hindus. He believed that duty towards his parents was of utmost importance.

One day, when they were crossing a thick forest, the old parents felt thirsty. So they said – "Dear Shravan, we are very thirsty. Please go and see if you could get some water for us." On hearing this, the young boy went looking for water in the forest. At the same time, King Dasharath was passing through the forest for hunting animals. He was so skilled in shooting arrows with his bow that he could hit his target with arrows just by hearing the animal's sound.

As it was already late in the night, the King was hiding on a tree at the bank of a river and waiting to hear the sound of an animal so that he could take aim and shoot. Soon, Shravan happened to come to that same river bank to fill his jug with water. As he immersed the jug into the river water, King Dasharath heard the bubbling sound and immediately fired an arrow in that direction of the sound, think that it was a deer.

Can you guess what happened? Yes, King Dasharath's arrow hit Shravan Kumar. Immediately, the injured Shravan screamed in extreme pain. Realizing that he had hit a human and not a deer,

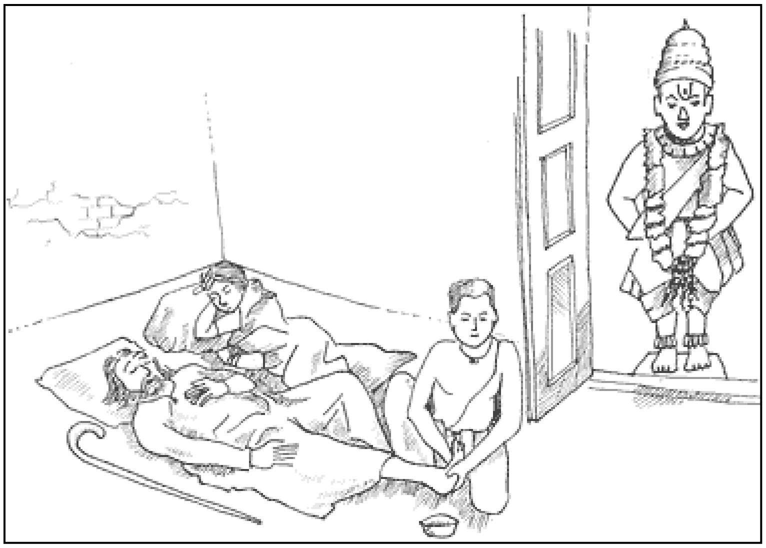
King Dasharath rushed to the river bank. He saw that his arrow had pierced the heart of poor Shravan.

Even though Shravan Kumar was in great pain, he only thought of his blind parents who were thirsty for water. He said to King Dasharath – "I had come to fetch some water for my blind parents but I have not been able to fulfill their wishes. I am not angry with you for killing me, because it was just my bad luck. But please do take this jug of water because they are thirsty and are waiting for me to bring them some water." Speaking these words, Shravan Kumar breathed his last.

Dear children, what do you learn from this story? The story shows that although Shravan was a little boy, he was very devoted to his parents. He was also intelligent in planning a way to take his parents on a pilgrimage and was ready to sacrifice his life for them at any moment. Even when he was dying, he only thought about getting water for his thirsty parents. Therefore, Hindus remember Shravan Kumar even today as an ideal son and hope to have children who are as devoted to their parents as Shravan Kumar was to his parents.

Further Reading: Story of a Modern Day Shravan Kumar:

http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story.aspx?id=NEWEN20090082931



Story: Krishna visits Pundalik, the Devoted Son and therefore His Devotee

The city of Pandharpur in southern Maharashtra in peninsular India has the famous temple of Vithoba, a form of Krishna. The temple has been associated with the Warkari tradition of Hindus and has attracted dozens of saints in the last several centuries.

The shrine's origins are related to one Pundalika who lived with his wife and old parents. Pundalika treated his parents with disdain. Once, his parents requested Pundalika to take them for a holy dip in the Ganga river in the city of Varanasi. Far from assisting them with their pilgrimage, Pundalik got angry and literally turned them out. "Go on your own, and fend for yourself on your journey to Varanasi," he said to them.

But, after a few days, he had a change of heart and thought that perhaps he and his wife too could visit Varanasi and get the benefit of the pilgrimage, and then bring his parents back. He was filled with remorse and guilt for ill-treating his own elderly parents. He woke up his wife, and they set out on their horses to look for his parents. Luckily, he found them soon. He took them respectfully on horseback to Varanasi, and after the pilgrimage was over, they all returned home.

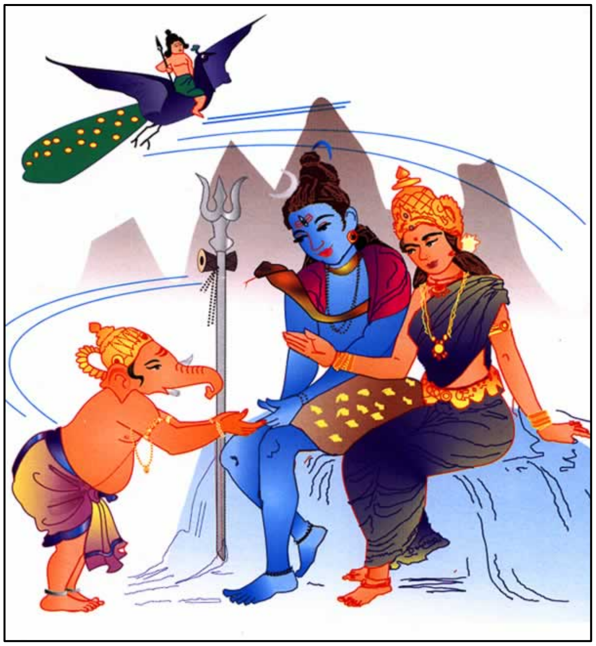
Now onwards, Pundalika was a changed man. He was now devoted to his parents. Far away in the city of Dwaraka, Krishna heard about the beautiful transformation of Pundalika and He decided to visit him. His wife Rukmini asked Krishna, “Why do you want to visit Pundalik?” Krishna replied, “Because by serving his parents, he has been worshipping Me all the time.”

When Krishna reached Pundalika’s home, the latter was absorbed in massaging his father’s feet and therefore did not pay attention to the visitor. But when he noticed the divine light emitting from the body of Krishna, he turned around and said, “My Lord, I am serving my parents right now and cannot leave the feet of my father unattended. But I am throwing this brick at you. Kindly use this as a stool till I am done with my father, and then I will come and attend to you. Krishna humbly stood on the brick, waiting patiently for Pundalika, with His hands on his waist, his arms akimbo.

When Pundalika’s father went to sleep, he went to the door to welcome Krishna. The Lord was so pleased with Pundalika’s regard for his parents now, that he asked Pundalika to request a boon from Him. Pundalika had just one request, “Bhagavan, please stay with me forever on this brick.” Krishna complied and transformed Himself into the Mūrti of ‘Vitthala’ (‘Vit’ = brick; ‘sthala’ = location, station). Pundalika was too declared a saint after sone time. Over his samādhi in a temple on the Bhima river, a Shivalinga was erected. Even today, pilgrims first visit the Shiva temple before offering worship at the Vitthala temple in Pandharpur. This story shows how Pundalika earned the blessings of Bhagavān by doing his duty towards his parents.

Story: Ganesha and Karttikeya – Who won the race?

One day, Bhagavan Shiva and Devi Parvati called their two sons Ganesha and Karttikeya. Parvati said to them – “I want you two to have a race. Both of you should start from here. Then go around the world one time and return here. I have a very tasty mango. Whichever one of you comes first, will get to eat this mango.



Now Karttikeya was very happy when he heard this. He was sure that he will win the race, because he can fly on a peacock. But Ganesha only had a mouse on which he could travel. So how could Ganesha beat him in the race?

As soon as their father Shiva said ‘one, two, and three…..” Karttikeya sat on his peacock and started flying on his peacock to go around the world. But Ganesha did not even start! Instead, he folded his hands in a ‘Namaste’ and bowed in front of his parents. Then, he just took a round of his parents, and said – “Dear Mom and Dad, you are more important to me than the whole world. Therefore, I will just go around you three times.” Just after

Ganesha had completed his third round, Karttikeya landed back on his peacock.

Karttikeya was so happy to see that Ganesha had not even left that place. "Aha," he said, "I have won the race." "No,' said their mother Parvati, "It is your brother Ganesha who won." Karttikeya was shocked. "This is cheating, Ganesha did not even leave this place," he said.

But their parents explained to him – "Look, we only wanted to test you two brothers. Ganesha won because he showed that he loved his parents more than the whole world. But you thought you can leave your parents behind and win a prize. So, the mango will be given as a prize to Ganesha."

Karttikeya learned a very nice lesson from his brother Ganesha. *He learned that no one else in the world cares for us as much as our parents. Therefore, we should always give more importance and respect to our parents than anyone else in the whole world.* This is what Ganesha had done, and therefore he won the race!

Story: Shankaracharya Changes the Course of River for his Mother

In the late century lived a young boy Shankaracharya with his widowed mother in the village of Kaladi in the Indian state of Kerala. One day, his mother fell ill and she was no longer able to walk from a hut to batch in the river that flowed at a distance.

The little boy Shankaracharya got together his friends, and dug a channel from the river that flowed right past his home. Now his mother just had to walk out of their home for a dip. This channel dug by Shankaracharya still exists to today.

After sometime, Shankaracharya wanted to become a Sadhu in pursuit of spiritual knowledge. His mother was very worried at that because he was her only support. However, Shankaracharya made sure that his relatives would provide for his aged mother. He also promised to her that he would return to see her whenever she needed him.

Many years later, when Shankaracharya had become a very learned and a famous saint, he felt that his mother needed him. By his yogic powers, he flew back to his home where his mother was waiting for him before she breathed her last. By his spiritual powers, he had her get a darshana of Vishnu and Shiva. When she passed away, he prepared for her cremation.

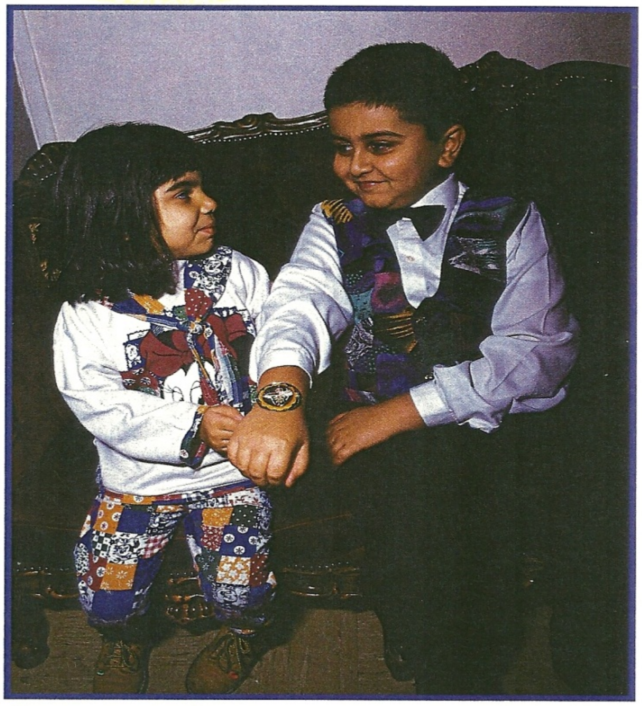
In the Hindu tradition, a Sadhu is not allowed to cremate his parents, because he has technically ended all his relations with everyone. So, Shankaracharya prayed and by a miracle, the wooden pyre with his mother’s body lit on its own. Those who had gathered around to criticize Shankaracharya saw the miracle and felt ashamed at their own harshness. They asked the saint for forgiveness, and he obliged.

4. Behavior towards Siblings:

Most of us have younger or older siblings. Hindu Dharma teaches us to respect our elder siblings, and love and forgive the younger ones. In fact, when the older brother or sister is older to you by several years, he or she should be considered as a father or mother. Likewise, you should not fight with or tease our little brothers and sisters over little things, because you too did the same silly things when you were younger. The bond between a brother and a sister is celebrated in the Hindu society through the festival of Rakshabandhan.

Raksha Bandhan

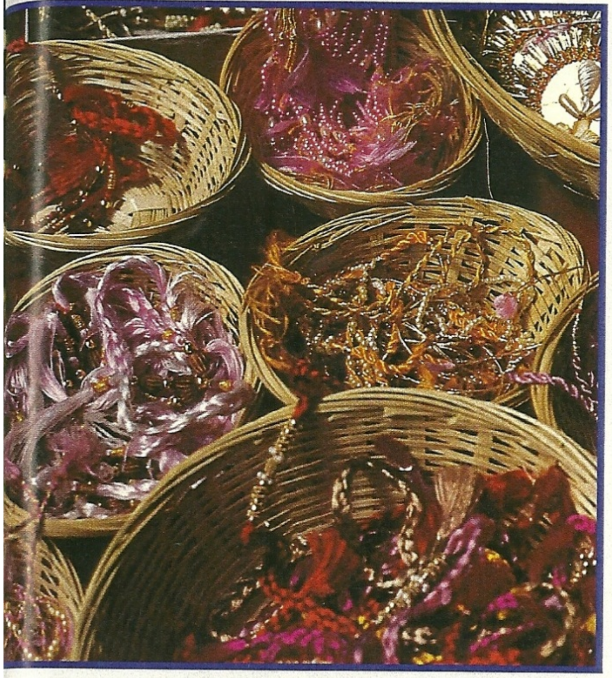
The festival of *Raksha Bandhan* takes place in August. This is a special time for Hindu brothers and sisters when they show their love for each other and promise to look after each other. *Raksha Bandhan* is celebrated all over India and in other countries where Hindus have settled. If people do not have brothers or sisters, it does not matter. In Hindu families, cousins and very close family friends count as brothers and sisters, too.



This Hindu girl is tying a *rakhi* around her brother's wrist.

Brothers and sisters

On *Raksha Bandhan*, girls perform a special ceremony. First the girl says a prayer to ask God to look after her brother. Then she makes a mark with red powder on his forehead. This is a *tilak*, a sign of blessing. Next she ties a colorful bracelet, called a *rakhi*, around her brother's right wrist to protect him from evil. This is where the festival gets its name. *Raksha* means "protection," and *Bandhan* means "to tie." In return, the brother promises to look after his sister in the coming year. At the end of the ceremony, the brother gives his sister a gift of money or jewelry. Brothers are supposed to wear their *rakhis* until the thread breaks.



Many Hindu women buy ready-made *rakhis* from market stalls. They send them by mail to brothers who live far away.

Raksha Bandhan stories

There are many stories explaining how *Raksha Bandhan* began. One story tells of a war between the gods and the demons. A demon king, called Bali, fought Indra, king of the gods, and drove him out of his kingdom. Indra's wife asked Lord Vishnu for help. He gave her a silk bracelet to tie around Indra's wrist to keep Indra safe. When Bali and Indra fought again, the bracelet protected Indra. He defeated the demon and won his kingdom back.

Another story tells of a great warrior, Abhimanyu, whose grandmother gave him a *rakhi* to wear. While he was wearing it, he could not be harmed. But when the *rakhi* broke in battle, Abhimanyu was killed.

Making a *rakhi*

There are hundreds of different types of *rakhi*, made from twisted thread or ribbon, and decorated with beads, tinsel, sequins, and pompoms.

To make a *rakhi:*

1. Cut a piece of brightly colored ribbon, long enough to go around your wrist.
2. Cut a small circle out of cardboard and stick it on to the ribbon, halfway along its length.
3. Decorate the cardboard with shiny sequins, tiny beads, glitter, or tinsel.

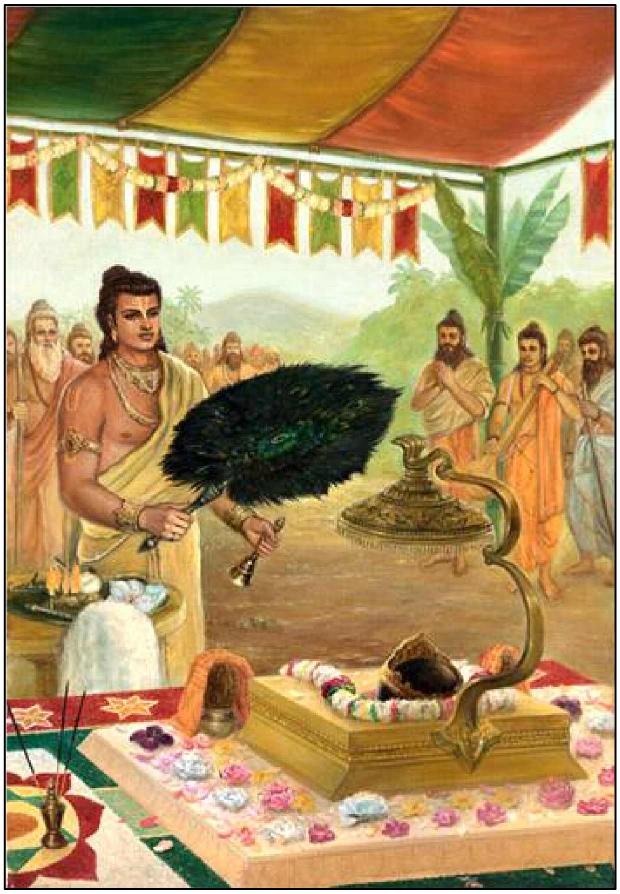
A store-bought *rakhi*.

Story: The Love Between Brothers in the Ramayana

Long, long ago, there ruled King Dasharatha in the kingdom called Ayodhya. He had three wives, from whom he had four sons. Queen Kaushalya's son was Rama, the eldest of the four. Sumitra's sons Lakshmana and Shatrughna; and Kaikeyi's son Bharat.

Rama was the eldest of all the brothers. *He always took care of all his three younger brothers and loved them a lot. These three younger brothers also respected Rama a lot.* When the four brothers became grown up, they all married. The wife of Lord Rama was Devi Sita. She was the daughter of King Janaka.

When King Dasharatha became an old man, he decided to make Rama the king of Ayodhya after him. Everyone was very happy. But Queen Kaikeyi had a maid named Mantharā. She told Kaikeyi that it would be better for them if Bharat, who was Kaikeyi's own son, became the king instead. Suddenly, Kaikeyi became jealous that Rama, her step-son was becoming the king. She now wanted her own son Bharat to become the king. Therefore, she forced King Dasharatha to send Rama to the forest for fourteen years. When Rama learned that he was being sent to the forest, he was not upset at all. In fact, he expressed happiness that his brother Bharata had been chosen to rule Ayodhya. Shocked by the turn of events, King Dasharatha died.



Now, Bharat did not know what was going on in Ayodhya, because he was visiting his grandfather far away from his home. If Bharat had known that his elder brother was being sent to the forest, he would have been very angry with the bad behavior of his mother and father. When Rama decided to leave for the forest, his wife Devi Sita insisted that she will also go with him. Then, his brother Lakshmana

also decided to leave for the forest with his brother Rama. *Like Sita and Lakshmana, we should also share the bad luck of our family members just as we like to share their good things.*

When Bharata returned to Ayodhya and learned what had happened in his absence, he was extremely angry with his mother. He refused to become the king. He immediately went to the forest to bring back Rama with royal pomp and install him as the King of Ayodhya. But there in the forest, Rama refused to come back so that his father's promise to Kaikeyi would be upheld.

Then, Bharat requested Rama to give him his pair of sandals. Bharata took the sandals to Ayodhya where he placed them on the royal throne. Bharata worshipped the sandals and decided to rule Ayodhya as Rama's regent, till Rama himself returned fourteen years later to reclaim his throne.

Story: Love between Siblings in the Mahabharata:

"The five Pandava brothers in the Mahabharata exemplify the bond of brotherly love and respect even during adversity. After Yudhishthira is tricked in a game of dice and loses everything including the freedom of his brothers and their wife Draupadi, his brothers stand by him. While the bothers live in the forest, they equally share whatever food they obtain. Yudhishthira, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, furthermore, each share half of their portions with Bhima, the largest and strongest of the five, so that his hunger can be appeased."[8]

Vedic Prayer

"Let no brother hate his brother. Let no sister hate her sister.
May you all speak and behave with harmony and sweetness.
May you all be unanimous and of one accord."[9] **Atharvaveda 3.30.3**

[8] Page 112. in Purnavidya, vol 6
[9] Pandit Satyakam Vidyalankar, p. 230

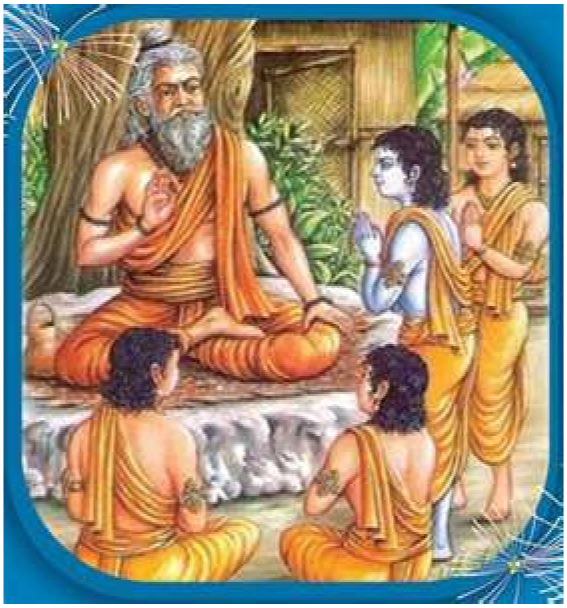
The Cartoon below illustrates the difference between a good sibling and a bad sibling.

5. Respecting our Gurus and Rishis

> These three are the main Gurus of a human being – mother, father and his teacher.
> **Vishnu Smriti 31.1-2**

5.1 Who is a Guru?

The word 'Guru' itself means 'remover of darkness and ignorance'. The Hindu tradition gives much more importance to personal instruction than to books. The Hoy Book of the Hindus, the Vedas, are themselves called 'Shruti' or that which are heard (from Bhagavān and from teacher). We Hindus do not believe that Bhagavān inscribed his commandments in writing for us and handed them over to us. Rather, inspired Sages and Saints heard His Voice within their hearts, and then narrated it to others. And the recitation of Vedas continues to this day, through an unbroken chain of teachers and students. Therefore, Bhagavān is called the first Guru of human beings in the Hindu traditions, and all traditional Guru-Disciple lineages are eventually traced all the way back to Him.



The respect that the Hindu tradition (as well as the allied Sikh, Buddhist and Jain traditions) asks us to give to our Guru is quite unknown in the western traditions where teachers are respected, but not to that extent. The reason for this is that the role of a Guru and a teacher are somewhat different.

A Guru need not be just a spiritual teacher. Every teacher, whether of music, painting, science and so on is considered a Guru. Likewise, Hindu scriptures state that one's Guru need not be a human being alone. In the Bhaagavata Purana, the Avadhuuta Gita enumerates 24 kinds of Gurus such as the ant and other creatures from whom humans can learn important lessons of life. Likewise, in the Chhandogya Upanishad, Satyakama Jabala gets instruction through observing the fire, a bull, a swan and so on.

5.2 Difference between a Guru and a Teacher:

A teacher typically imparts education for a payment. His teaching primarily makes us a scholar, or makes us fit to earn a decent living when we become adults. In contrast, a traditional Guru gives his education for free, and only to a few chosen students. A Guru's instruction is much more personal than that of a teacher.

5.3 Importance of a Guru & Guru Dakshinā

The word 'Guru' also means 'weighty', and perhaps this signifies his importance ('weight') in opening our eyes of knowledge and wisdom. Hindus believe that through his example, personal insight, original thinking and experience, the Guru infuses the teaching or instruction with a life. The teaching or knowledge becomes alive only through the Guru, and mere bookish knowledge is not as useful as a teacher's instruction. In particular, in all schools of Hindu spirituality, the role of one's Guru is considered indispensable to achieving the final goal, which is reaching Bhagavān. He is a role model for his students, the very embodiment of wisdom and knowledge. Hindu scriptures therefore emphasize that we should approach a teacher for acquiring knowledge instead of just picking up a book. Therefore, the Upanishads say:

> Only knowledge received directly from the Guru does one learn that Truth that causes the highest good. **Chhaandogya Upanishad 4.4.3**
> The knowledge that one learns from a teacher helps one best to reach his goal. **Chhaandogya Upanishad 4.9.3**
> We (devatas) can give you the knowledge, but only your teacher can really show you the way. **Chhaandogya Upanishad 4.14.1**

At the same time, it is indeed very difficult to find a true Guru. Read the story later in this chapter about how Sant Kabir found his Guru. Hindu scriptures describe the true Guru in the following words:

> **Who is a True Teacher?**
> They call those men Acharyas who are devoid of greed, who are self-possessed and devoid of arrogance, straight forward and who are educated and self disciplined. **Brahmaanda Purana 1.2.32.31**
> "An Acharya is one who fully understands the conclusions of the revealed scriptures. His own behavior reflects his deep realization, and thus he is a living example of divine precept. He is therefore known as an Acharya, or one who teaches the meaning of the scriptures both by word and deed." **Brahmaanda Purana 1.2.32.32**

The relationship between a Guru and his disciple is begun with a ceremony which likens the initiation of the student to be his rebirth in the womb of the Guru[10]. This is because whereas the parents give only a physical birth to the student, he is reborn in wisdom or spirituality only when he meets his Guru. Upon the completion of his studies, the student is required to give a 'Guru Dakshina' or a humble offering to his Guru, with his best possible ability. Later in this chapter, we will read how King Anandapal and Swami Dayanand Saraswati offered the Dakshinas to their respective Gurus.

5.4 Showing our respect to our Gurus

Hindus show their reverence for their Teachers in many ways –

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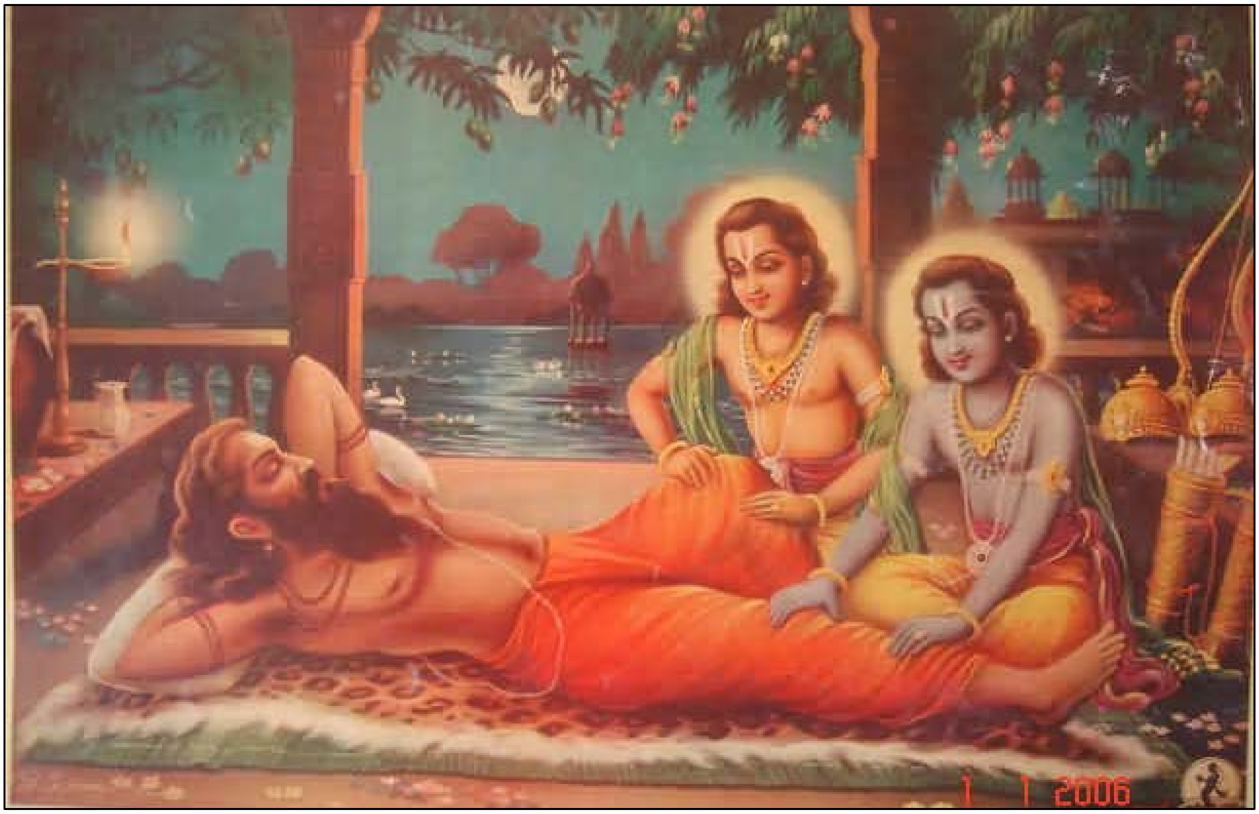
[10] Atharva Veda 11.5.3



1. By celebrating the festival of Vyāsa Pūrṇimā, also called Guru Pūrṇimā.
2. We do not address our Guru by his name. Hindu students who live in the west should never call their teacher by their first names. They should always be addressed by their title and their surname (e.g., Dr Smith, Mr. Jones).
3. Never yell at the Guru.
4. In their day to day dealings with their teachers, students typically are expected to walk behind their teachers, sit behind them in the audience, speak in a voice softer than their teacher.
5. While walking behind the Guru, if he sees a door ahead, the student is expected to run to his teacher's front and open the door for him.
6. The student must not eat in the presence of his teacher; smoking and drinking alcohol is therefore out of question.
7. The student does not sit while his teacher stands. If only one seat is available, the student offers it to his teacher.
8. If the teacher enters the student's room, the latter must rise to greet him.
9. A picture of a lifelong teacher must be placed along with icons of gods in the student's personal shrine in his home. In fact, Hindu scriptures state that without serving one's Guru and showing him reverence, one cannot attain Moksha[11].

Let us see pictorially how you can show your respects to your teacher in the present times through the example of a good student and a bad student –

[11] Manusmriti 12.83

5.4 Guru and Bhagavān

Due to the importance of Guru in our learning process, Hindu scriptures ask students to worship one's Guru as they would worship Bhagavān Himself[12]. Later Bhakti saints such as Kabirdas consider Guru as superior to God himself, because it is the former who makes us get a glimpse of God. Hindu scripture says –

[12] E.g., Shvetaashvatara Upanishad 6.23

The guru must be considered to be like the Supreme Lord Himself, because he bestows the light of transcendental knowledge upon his disciples. Consequently, for one who maintains the material conception that the guru is an ordinary human being, everything is frustrated. His attempts to make progress in spiritual life - his Vedic studies and scriptural knowledge, his penances and austerities, and his worship of the Deva - are all as useless as the bathing of an elephant who rolls in the mud after his bath. **Srimad-Bhagavata Purāṇa** **11.20.17**

5.5 The Festival of Guru Pūrṇimā: Veda Vyasa, The Greatest Guru after Bhagavān

The full-moon night in the month of Ashaadh in the Hindu calendar, is celebrated the birthday of Sage Veda Vyāsa. Therefore, this day is called Vyāsa Purnima, where the word Purnima means 'full-moon night'. Since Veda Vyāsa was an exemplary teacher (=Guru), his birthday is also celebrated as 'Guru Purnima' or the Teacher's night, and traditional Hindus honor their teachers this day every year.

All the major schools of Hindu Spirituality trace their tradition of teachers and students all the way back to Veda Vyāsa, who lived approximately 3500 years ago (15th cent. BCE). He is said to have compiled the four Vedas in a form close that available today, and then have taught them to his four students. Next, he also wrote the Mahabharata, and compiled the Puranas (totaling half a million verses). He is also sometimes credited with the short work called 'Vedānta Sūtras' in which the teachings of the Upanishads are explained in a very logical and a systematic way. In this way, Veda Vyāsa was involved in giving shape to most of the important scriptures of Hindu Dharma.

The following are the traditional verses that are chanted in the honor of this great Rishi:

OM! Salutations to Veda Vyasa, the descendent of Vasistha Muni
and the sinless grandson of Shakti.
Salutations to the son of Parashar, To the father of Sukadeva,
To him who is an repository of spiritual austerities ||
Salutations to Vyasa, an incarnation of Vishnu.
Salutations to Vishnu in the form of Vyasa!
Salutations to him who is a repository of Brahman and the Vedic lore
Repeated prostrations to the descendant of Sage Vasistha ||
Salutations to Vyasa, who is Brahma without the four heads
Who is Vishnu with out the four arms, Who is Shiva without the third eye.
Prostrations to Bhagavan Badarayana, the teacher of Vedanta ||
[Traditional verses in praise of Veda Vyasa, loosely translated]

Stories about Gurus and their Students in the Hindu Tradition

Story: Mādhavadeva takes away the sin of his Guru Shankaradeva

Kalindi, the wife of Sant Shankaradeva, always complained that all he cared about was his disciples and his social and spiritual activities. He had no time for his own family members, she remarked.

One day, Shankaradeva returned from his morning walk and sat outside his house, with a forlorn look. Kalindi asked as to why he had not gone in to take his bath as he was accustomed to, after his walk. Shankaradeva responded that he had inadvertently committed a great sin that morning. While walking, he had gently pushed away a calf out of his way. But the creature unexpectedly collapsed and died. Therefore, he was tainted by bad karma, and must perform an atonement.

Kalindi agreed, and told him not to take a bath or even enter the house till he atoned for his sin. He must feed several devotees of Krishna, take their blessings and only then come inside. Soon thereafter, Madhavadeva, the principal disciple of Shankaradeva arrived. When he saw his Guru sitting outside the house with a pained look on his face, he asked for the reason. Upon learning what had happened, he immediately requested his Guru to go in and take his bath and resume his activities, saying that, "On your behalf, I will take all your sin on me. I will perform all the atonements for you and will even go to hell in your place if I have to."

When Kalindi heard Madhavadeva's words, she realized how much disciples of Shankaradeva loved him from their heart.

Story: Āruṇi's Devotion towards his Guru

"Āruṇi was the son of Rishi Aruni. As per the tradition of the time, though Rishi Aruni was learned, he sent his son to study with another learned Rishi named Dhaumya. Āruṇi knew the secret of gaining the knowledge as he was the son of a Rishi. He knew that service of the Guru is the key, as it rains our mind and makes it more receptive.

His teacher gave him a job of taking care of a small farm in the outskirts of the town. The arm was on a small hill. In the rainy season, Āruṇi noticed water flowing down the hill and his crop was not getting enough water. So he told his teacher and the teacher

said, “Why don’t you build a dam so that water can be saved for the farm?” Āruṇi went to build a dam.

He started pouring dirt to build the dam. Regardless of how much dirt he poured, it all went with the flow of water as the water current was swift. He tried and tried, but failed. He was tired but he needed to stop the flow of water as it was the command of his teacher!

He finally got a brilliant idea. He spread himself on the ground, lying across the place where the water was flowing. He could thus stop the flow of water. It was late evening and he was thirsty and hungry. But, how could he leave? He was the dam! He decided to stay there as the dam!

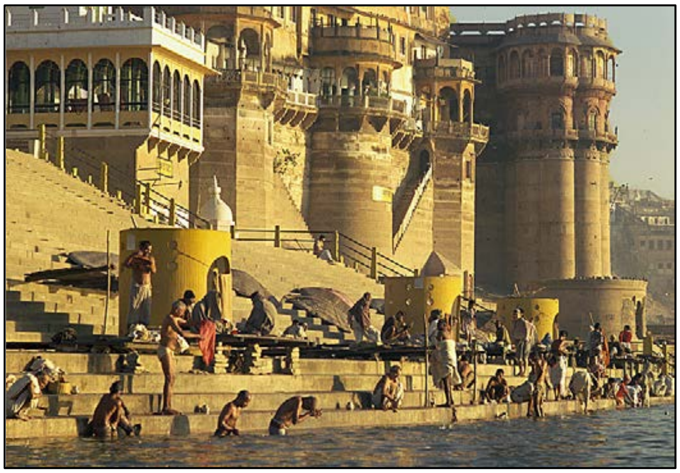
His teacher noticed that Āruṇi was not back from the form. So, he along with a few other students went to look for Āruṇi. To the teacher’s surprise, Āruṇi was lying down on the ground as the dam, to prevent water from flowing down!

Rishi Dhaumya saw Āruṇi’s faith in the teacher and his words. Dhaumya was a man of wisdom and so he told Āruṇi that water will not flow down when he got up, because a dam had formed against his body as he lay on the ground for several hours. And he blessed Āruṇi and told him that he will be henceforth famous by the name Uddālaka.”

Due to his devotion to his Guru, Āruṇi became a great Rishi in his own right when he completed his education.

Story: How Sant Kabir met his Guru

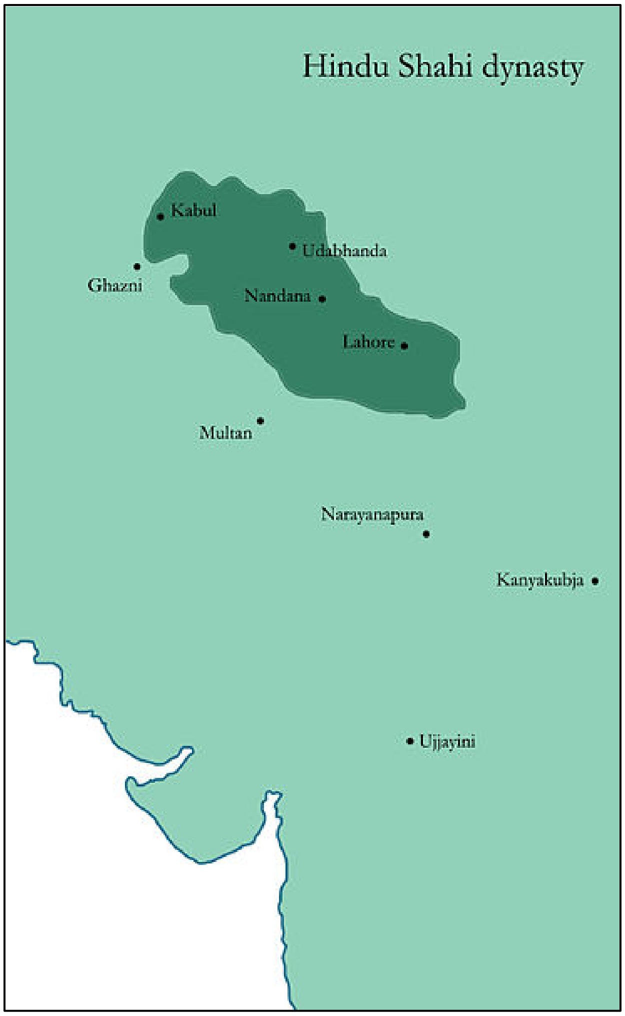
Kabir, who lived in the holy city of Varanasi, was a very spiritually oriented person and he was searching for a true Guru. He heard that a great saint named Ramananda had arrived with his disciples. He wanted to become a disciple of Ramananda but was worried that he might not be accepted because Ramananda was a Hindu saint, whereas Kabir himself had been raised by Muslim parents.



Ramananda used to go every morning to take a bath in the Ganga River. On the banks of Ganga in Varanasi, are famous stepped ‘ghats’. Pilgrims descend into the river by walking down the steps of these ghats. One day, when it was early morning and it was still somewhat dark, Kabir lay flat on one of these steps. Ramananda walked towards the river, and accidentally stepped on a leg of Kabir. He immediately uttered, “Ram, Ram,” in devotion towards Bhagavān and also to apologize to Kabir. Kabir was elated and he immediately jumped up, “I have met my Guru, and he has given me the mantra of ‘Ram Ram.’”

Ramananda was greatly elated with the faith and sincerity of Kabir and accepted him as his disciple. In his later years, Kabir wrote numerous verses in praise of the true Guru. Some of these are translated below –

> “The Guru as well as Govinda are both standing in front of me and I am in a fix as to whose feet I should bow to first. I decided to touch the feet of the Guru, because he was the one who showed me the path to Gobind. There are many in this world who wear the garb of a Sadhu and beg from home to home. But they are not true Gurus, and in the absence of a true Guru, one’s education remains incomplete. Therefore, says Kabir, even if you have to get your head cut to obtain a true Guru, consider it to be a good bargain!”



Story: Anandapāla Shāhī’s Guru Dakshina to his Guru Ugrabhuti Bhatta

In the 9th and the 10th centuries CE, the regions today occupied by Muslim Pathans in NW Pakistan and Eastern Afghanistan were Hindu territory ruled by Hindu Shahi dynasty with their capital moving between Kabul, Peshawar and other cities. King Anandapala Shahi ruled this kingdom from 1001 – 1010 CE (see the map of his kingdom). His Guru Ugrabhuti Bhatta was a renowned scholar of Sanskrit grammar and he wrote a very learned book on this subject. The neighboring Hindu kingdom of Kashmir (to its east) was also famous for its scholarship. Therefore, King Anandapala sent copies of his Guru’s work to the Kashmiri scholars in the hope of promoting it.

But the Kashmiri Hindi scholars were very snobbish at that time, and they did not easily adopt books that were written by others. Ugrabhuti Bhatta was therefore disheartened, but his student Anandapala came to his help. He announced that he will distribute 200,000 gold coins and many other gifts to Kashmiri scholars who would study the work of his Guru. The Kashmiri scholars fell for this gift, and as a result, Ugrabhuti's work acquired great popularity in Kashmir.

This act of Ugrabhuti to promote the beautiful work of Guru had a lasting effect. Within two decades, his own kingdom was completely over-run by Mahmud Ghazni, the fanatical Muslim king of Ghazni. Mahmud eradicated Hindu Dharma from his kingdom to the best extent possible, destroying temples, slaughtering Brahmanas, burning Hindu scriptures and forcibly converting many Hindus to Islam. Hindu learning practically ceased to exist in Afghanistan and the NW parts of Pakistan. But it took at least 3 more centuries for Muslims to gain the political control of Kashmir. Even thereafter, Hindu learning in that Kashmir survived right down to the present times. And there also survived the beautiful Sanskrit grammar work of Ugrabhuti. Due to the magnanimity of Anandapala, his Guru's work continued to be used as a textbook of Sanskrit grammar in some regions of northern India right down to the early 20th cent. CE.

Point of Discussion: Most of you will not grow up to become Kings and Queens. But when you start earning, there are many ways in which you can promote education in general, and also support the work of your favorite teachers. Can you list some ways in which you can do that?

1. ____

2. ____

3. ____

Story: How Swami Dayanand Saraswati paid his Guru Dakshina

Around the year 1860, Swami Dayanand Sarasvati was on a search of a Guru who could teach him the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar. He carried with him manuscripts of the grammar book Sārasvata Kaumudi and other books which were very expensive and rare in those days. One day, he heard that the blind man Swami Virjanand of Mathura was a great scholar of Sanskrit grammar. So one night, he knocked at the door of Swami Virjanand, who asked Swami Dayanand what books he had studied and what books he was carrying.

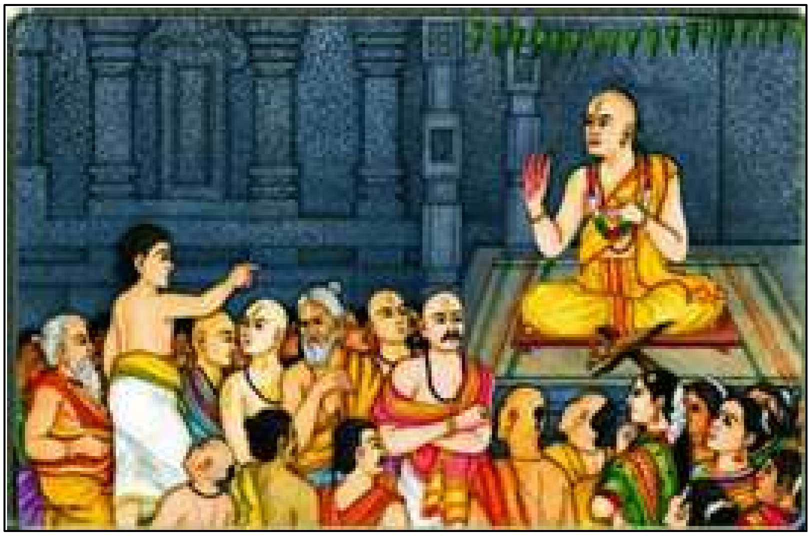
Swami Dayanand Sarasvati responded, “I have studied the grammar in Sārasvata Kaumudi and some other books, and I am carrying their manuscripts. But I have still not been able to master the grammar of Sanskrit.” Swami Virjanand replied, “Then these books are of no use. Go and throw your manuscripts in the waters of the Yamuna river.” With batting an eyelid, Swami Dayanand Sarasvati went to the Yamuna river and threw away his manuscripts.

When he returned to Swami Virjanand, the latter said, “All books of grammar created by small minds in recent times are of little use. Instead, you should study grammar from the works of Panini and Patanjali written several thousand years ago. Only the works of great Rishis and Munis like them can help you master the subject of Sanskrit grammar.” Swami Dayanand then spent a few years studying grammar under Swami Virjanand with the help of books of the Rishis, and mastered the subject. When it was time to depart from his Guru, he offered some cloves to Swami Virjanand (thinking that they will soothe the pain due to his stomach ulcers) as a parting gift. But Swami Virjanand said, “There was no need to give me a gift. But I need a promise from you – that you will devote your life to teach and popularize the works of great Rishis, and that you will spread the message of the Vedas to the common people even if you have to lose your life in this effort. You will never compromise with evil, and will not hesitate to criticize the superstitions in our society.”

Swami Dayanand agreed and spent the remaining years of his life spreading the message of the Vedas and popularizing other works of Rishis all over north India. Several attempts were made on his life by evil people, but he never stepped back and always forgave those who had tried to kill him, and never went back on the promise that he had given to his Guru.

5.6 Can we disagree from our Teacher?

Respecting one’s Guru does not mean that you cannot differ from them even if they are wrong. In fact, in the Hindu scripture Taittiriya Upanishad, the Gurus address their students who are graduating and say to them, “Follow us only when we are correct. Do not copy us when we are wrong.” (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11). In the Hindu tradition itself, we read about many students who disagreed with their teachers.



Story: Rāmānujāchārya Disagrees with his Guru:

In the 11th century, Ramanujacharya was studying Hindu scriptures under Yādavaprakāsha, a very famous scholar in the city of Kancheepuram (close to the modern city of Chennai in India). Once, the teacher was explaining a phrase ‘kapyāsam pundarīkam’ occurring in the scripture Chhandogya Upanishad while

Ramanuja was messaging his legs. The teacher explained the phrase in this manner, "The eyes of Bhagavān are red like the red buttocks of a monkey." When Ramanujacharya heard this explanation, he was deeply hurt and tears fell from his eyes on the legs of his teacher. Yādavaprakāsha understood that his student did not like his explanation, and asked Ramanuja to explain the same passage in Sanskrit. Ramanuja said, "Respected Guru, the passage means that the eyes of Bhagavān are as beautiful as the red lotuses that come out of water at sunrise."

In the course of time, many other differences of understanding of Hindu scriptures arose between the Guru and his disciple. Envious of the knowledge of Ramanuja, Yādavaprakāsha conspired with his other students to kill Ramanuja by drowning him in a river. But one of the students turned out to be Ramanuja's cousin and divulged the plot to him. Ramanuja slipped out of the school to save his life.

Hindu tradition records that after a few years, Yādavaprakāsha realized that his student Ramanuja was indeed correct and was more knowledgeable than he was. So he approached Ramanuja and apologized. And more than that, he requested Ramanuja to now become his teacher. Ramanuja consented, and now his former teacher became his own disciple.

Another famous example of student – teacher pair in which both were brilliant but differed from each other is that of Bhatta Kumārila and his student Prabhākara Mishra (7th Cent. CE). Both were experts in the science of performing ritual ceremonies that are taught in the Vedic scriptures, but they had different interpretations of the same. Both wrote great works on Mimāmsā, a branch of Hindu philosophy which interprets the Vedic ritual, with differing viewpoints. Their works led to the foundation of two competing schools of Mimāmsā.

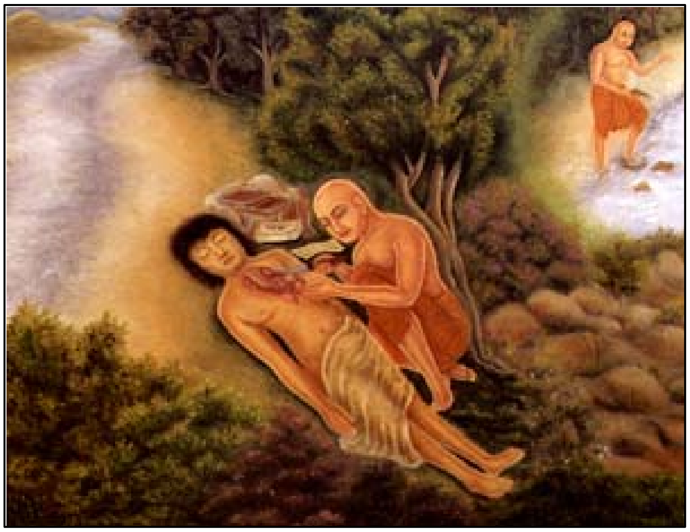
5.7 Cultivate a Questioning Attitude, not Blind Faith:

Respecting one's Guru does not mean that we accept whatever he says. No one knows everything, including your teacher. Therefore, if you have a doubt, ask your teacher. And if your questions are not answered satisfactorily, then do your own investigation.

Hindu Dharma teaches us to accept something only if it makes sense to us, and if it seems correct. A Sanskrit proverb says, "Do not accept a false statement even if it has been said by Brahmā." Shankarāchārya (7th-8th cent. C.E.), one of the greatest Hindu philosophers, had also said that even if hundreds of verses in the Vedas were to say that 'fire is cold', then we cannot accept it because by our own experience, fire is hot and burns us! In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna teaches the entire philosophy of Hindu Dharma to Arjuna. But at the end, He does not say, "It is My command that you must follow whatever I have said." Instead, Krishna asked him whether his delusion of ignorance was destroyed by His answers to Arjuna's questions. Below are two stories illustrating the Hindu value of questioning and open-mindedness.

Story: Swami Dayanand Saraswati Dissects a Corpse

Swami Dayanand read elaborate descriptions of human anatomy (the structure of organs, bones inside the body) through some newer books of Hathayoga (a branch of Yoga that focusses on breathing and



physical exercises) like the Hathayogapradipika. However, the complicated descriptions of these books had really confused him. One day, as he was walking on the banks of the Ganga river in the town of Garhmukteshwar, he saw a corpse floating by.

Swami Dayanand dragged the corpse out of the water. With a knife, he cut the abdomen to examine the heart. He also examined some areas in the neck and the head, and tried to compare them with the anatomical descriptions given in the works of Hathayoga. After sometime, the Swami concluded that the descriptions in these books did not match the actual structure of the human body. Therefore, Swami Dayanand concluded that these books were inaccurate and not reliable. Disappointed, he threw back these books and the corpse into the river. He came to the conclusion that only the Vedas and ancient works of Rishis like Patanjali and Kapila were true and accurate.

Story: Frog in the Well (Parable of Swami Vivekananda)

A frog lived all his life in a well and fattened on the worms and insects that were present in abundance in that well. He had never stepped out of the well. One day, there was a severe flood in the land surrounding the well. In that flood, another frog got washed out of the ocean and fell into the well. The well-frog asked of his visitor as to where he had come from. The ocean frog said, "Well, I am from the ocean."

"What is the ocean like? Is it as big as my well?" asked the well frog. The ocean frog laughed and replied, "The size of your well is nothing as compared to my ocean. Millions of your wells cannot fill my ocean. It is just endless in expanse."

The well frog responded, in anger and disbelief, "You are a big liar! There is nothing as large as my well." The ocean frog said, "You do not believe because you have never stepped outside of your well. Why don't you follow me and see for yourself?"

But the well frog refused and said, "Why should I follow you? You are just a liar because there cannot be any water body that is as big as my well. Now, don't waste my time and get out of my well." The ocean

frog realized that the well frog was close-minded and ignorant, and had no desire to explore things outside of his own little well in which he had lived in his comfort all his life. Therefore, he just jumped out of the well once the flood-waters subsided, and left the well frog to live back there in his own comfortable ignorance.

6.Respecting and Teaching your Classmates

We cannot necessarily choose our classmates. So we have to deal with them till the academic year ends! In this chapter, we will study two stories from the Hindu tradition. In the first story, we see how Prahlada teaches good values to his classmates. In the second story, we see how a student whom all of his classmates thought of as a dull boy turned out to be the most brilliant, and the favorite of his Guru. This story illustrates that we should never think of other students as dull or uncool. Perhaps, they have some special qualities that you are not aware of!

The Story of Prahlada, one of the best Bhaktas of Bhagavan Vishnu

Prahlada, son of an Asura called Hiranyakashipu and Kayadhu, was Bhagavan Vishnu's **bhakta**. Hiranyakashipu was a very evil king. He did not allow anyone in his kingdom to worship Bhagavan. He said – "No one should worship Vishnu because he is my enemy. If anyone wants to pray, he should worship me."

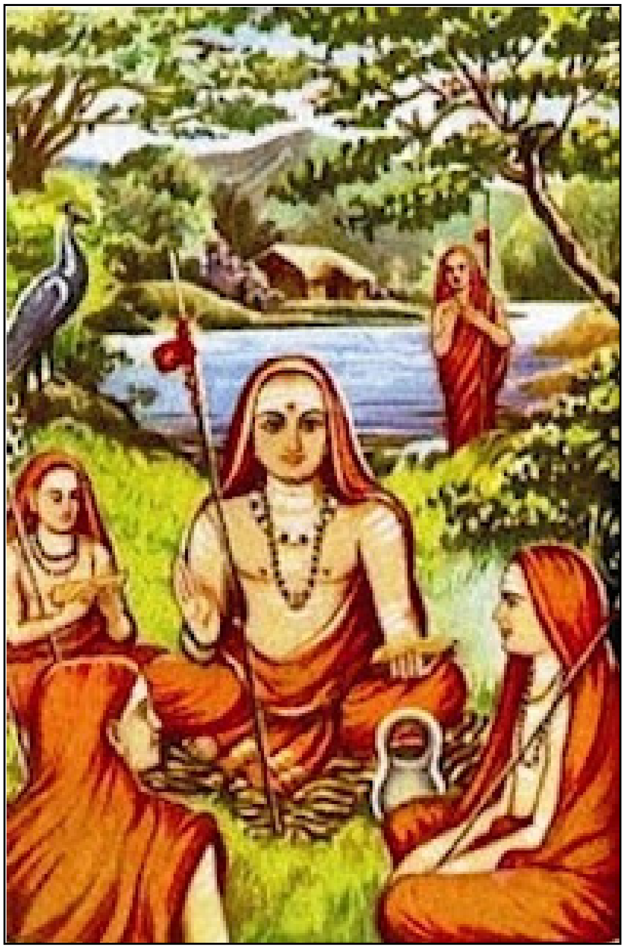
But, how own son Prince Prahlada was different from other children of his age. He spent the whole day thinking and singing of the Bhagavan's name, in addition to being a very good student. In his school, he would collect his classmates together and teach them:

"Life is short. We do not know if we will live tomorrow. And human birth is very difficult to get. We could have been animals or plants too! Therefore, we should not waste our lives as human. Right from the childhood, we should start worshipping Bhagavan Vishnu. Always try to hear stories of Vishnu, sing His praises, remember Him, serve His feet, worship Him, love Him as a friend, ask Him to protect you, and totally leave yourself in His hands. See Bhagavan Vishnu in everyone. Love and respect everyone because Vishnu lives inside us all. Bhagavan does not care whether we are rich or poor, ugly or handsome, learned or illiterate, wise or foolish. What He really cares for is whether we are truthful, loving, honest towards others and whether we love Him or not."

Prahlada had a profound and a positive effect on his classmates. They saw that although his own father, the King, was an evil man, Prahlada himself followed a very virtuous life. Therefore, they were influenced by his good teachings and grew to be good human beings themselves.

Story: The Favorite Student of Shankaracharya

Adi Shankaracharya (7th-8th century AD) is considered one of the greatest philosophers of Hindu Dharma. He taught us that the same Brahman or Supreme Being is the basis of the entire creation. Shankaracharya attracted numerous intelligent disciples for studying under him. But one of his disciples named Totaka (also called Anandagiri) was a particularly dull-witted student. He never spoke a word in the class, and always appeared to be someone who never understood anything. And yet, Shankaracharya would never start teaching his class before Totaka was seated in the classroom. Totaka himself never seemed to be interested in knowledge, and spent his time doing menial tasks like washing clothes, cooking or fetching water. One day, Totaka did not arrive on time, and the other students prodded their Guru, "Sir, why don't you start teaching? That Totaka does not understand anything anyway. So why should we all wait for him." But the Guru asked them to wait. When Totaka arrived, Shankaracharya said to him, "You are late. So as a punishment, let us hear a summary of all that I have taught from you in a few words."



Totaka bowed to his teacher humbly, and spontaneously composed a hymn called 'Totakashtakam'. The hymn, in a mere 8 very beautiful verses, explained the entire philosophical teachings of Shankaracharya. When the other students heard the dull-witted Totaka recite such a profound hymn, they were humbled. They had thought Totaka to be a fool, but now they understood why their Guru had a soft corner for him. Totaka eventually became one of the four major disciples of Shankaracharya.

This incident is a lesson for all students to respect their classmates and peers because everyone has some special quality even though he or she may appear to be very uncool and simple. We must never tease or bully others.

Discussion: What are the constructive ways in which you can deal with a classmate who bullies you all the time? If your own friends bully someone else, how will you reform them?

7. Choosing your Friends from Peers

7.1 Peer Pressure on Teenagers:

In the teenage years, a lot of mental and physical changes are occurring in you. It is also the time when you start making close friends, and want to experiment and explore new things in your lives. In our younger years, you were totally dependent on your parents, but now you become a bit more independent. You like to hang out with our friends, and form groups with other teenagers to do fun activities like playing sports, watching movies, doing homework and so on. You might even find your own parents boring and do not want them to be around you at all! To belong to any group, you might feel a pressure to do and like things which every other member of the group also likes. If you want to belong to a group in which teenagers like to play soccer, then you must also like to do so. If you do not play soccer, then how can you belong to that group?

The psychological pressure on oneself to conform to (or to follow and imitate) what other group members are doing is called peer pressure. There is no harm in your desire to belong to a group of other teenagers with whom you'd want to be friends with. But this does not mean that you do everything, whether right or wrong, to impress them that you are worthy of their group's membership.

Therefore, before falling a victim to the peer pressure from that group, you should decide whether that group is really the one that you should join. For example, if the members of a group of teenagers are into smoking and drugs, then you might well avoid it. Why? Because to join it and stay in it, you will be forced to smoke and do drugs like them.

Therefore, in teenage years, where friendships become very strong, and you want to be a part of a fun group, you must listen to your parents and teachers and also use your good judgment in choosing the right type of friends. If you fall into bad company, then it can ruin your entire later life. For example, if you make friends with teenagers who love to drive above the speed limit, there might come a day when you get into an accident (even though you were not the driver of the car) and become paralyzed for your whole life, for no fault of yours! So before succumbing to peer pressure, consider logically in your mind as to what the goal of your life is, whether you are pursuing friends with the wrong habits, and whether association with that group will not lead you into trouble.

7.2 Effect of the Company you keep on you:

It has been rightly said that a man is known by the company he keeps. Good people avoid bad people, and bad people like to associate with other bad people. Sometimes this is not true. But even a good person is perceived as bad by others if his friends have a questionable character. A Hindi proverb says, "Even if the most clever person goes into a coal-mine, he cannot prevent his clothes to get soiled by black marks." The meaning is that no matter how clever and good we

are, bad company surely starts affecting us in the course of time before we even realize it. The following story illustrates this fact-

> "A gardener was proceeding towards his master's house one morning, with a flower-pot on his head; and in the flower-pot was a beautiful, green plant growing which the gardener had taken immense pains to nourish. On the way, he met his shepherd friend who was going to his house with a sheep slung on his shoulders. The gardener had not met the shepherd for some time. He greated the shepherd with a big smile and the two began to talk. When the exchange of news came to an end, they went their way. The gardener wanted to take a look at the plant, before he entered the master's house. He lowered the pot from his head. To his horror, he discovered that there was not a leaf left in it, and that it was all but a bare stem. The sheep which his friend had around his shoulders had eaten away all the leaves while he was busy talking to him. How could he enter his master's house without the plant? He, therefore, returned to the garden, sorely disappointed."[13]

Therefore, Sundara Pandya said very correctly in the 7th cent. CE:

Avoid even the sight of foolish men. If one does see them, then avoid their company. If one does fall into the company of foolish men, then let him keep silent. And if one does have to speak amongst them, then let him too speak like them (to avoid trouble). **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 19**

7.3 Having Self Confidence and Self Respect:

You must never feel small when you see other students who have better looks, better grades, who wear better and cooler clothes and shoes and whose parents are richer. Everyone in this world has some unique skills and talents, and so do you. If there are people who are superior to you, so are there millions who are less fortunate than you are. Should they feel sadder than you for their less valuable gifts from Bhagavān? You should always instead thank Bhagavān for everything that He has given, even if it does not look sufficient to you. Reason with yourself how precious the human birth itself is! It is a unique opportunity for you to make the right choices, and to make progress in your life towards all of its goals. And these goals do not include making yourself feel small by comparing yourself to others who are richer, more beautiful, more intelligent or cooler than you are. Your primary friendship is with Bhagavān, and with others like your parents, siblings and with your true friends because they love you for who you are and just the way you are.

---

[13] Swami Sivananda. 2004. Parables of Swami Sivananda. The Divine Life Society. Tehri-Garhwal (Uttaranchal), India; pages 67-68

7.4 Finding Your True Friends

Many a times, you might try very hard to belong to some group, but its members do not show any respect for you. They make fun of you, or even bully you. And if at all, you do participate in some of their fun activities, you end up realizing that they have merely used you. For example, some 'friends' who have no respect for you may suddenly show up at your place when they learn that you have the latest video game available in the market. Keep in mind that these friends are not really your friends. They are merely selfish people who just want to use something unique you have. And once they are done using your unique possession, of when you are in trouble, they will abandon you immediately and will wash their hands off you.

So who is a true friend? Sant Tulsidas has given the following characteristics of a true friend in his works:

1. A true friend becomes sad whenever you are in a bad situation, and he is happy when you are happy.
2. He tries to help you as much as he can. He does not run away from you when you are in trouble.
3. If you acquire a bad habit, or if you are taking a bad decision, a true friend will try best to correct you and to help you make the correct decision. He will not worry about, "My friend will get upset if I tell him the truth, so let me just say to him what he wants to hear," but instead he will always give you the advice that will truly benefit you. Conversely, he helps you acquire and enhance your good habits.
4. He will never talk bad about you behind your back. If he has a grudge against you, he will talk to you openly and directly.
5. He always feels happy to see you.
6. A true friend always tells his true feelings and thoughts to you and does not hide anything from you.

In his collection of proverbs, the Saint and poet Sundara Pandya (before 7th cent CE) gives some very useful advice regarding friendship in the following words -

> "Following are the characteristics of a bad friend- making fun of their friend in public, showing friendship only as long as some benefit is obtained from the relationship, and not forgetting the bad deeds of his friend towards him." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 46**
>
> "Friendship with the good grows day by day just as the sap of from top to bottom, joint by joint. Friendship of the wicked is opposite in nature to this." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 16**
>
> "Just as a chameleon changes colors, the low and wicked too put on three different colors. At first, he acts as relative, next as a friend and at the end, he turns out to be an enemy." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 47**

"One should retain formal courtesy only as long as friendship has not been achieved. Once friendship is acquired, formal courtesy is a sign of deceit."
Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 53

So these are the criteria by which you should judge whether you should be friends with someone or not. Mere 'peer pressure' is not the correct way to make friends.

Story: Krishna, the true friend of Sudāmā

Krishna had a classmate in school whose name was Sudama. They were very good friends. After their studies were over, Krishna started living in the city of Dwaraka. He married a princess, and became the king of Dwaraka. Krishna was now very rich, famous and powerful. But he never forgot his friend Sudama. After finishing studies, Sudama married and had a few children. He and his family lived in a village. They were very poor. On some days, Sudama did not even have food to feed his children. One day, his wife got very upset because the kids had to go to bed hungry. She said to Sudama, "Please go to Krishna. He is your friend. If you ask him for money, he will help you."

Sudama said, "I will go to see my friend. But I am too shy to ask for any help. Krishna used to love **poha** (a rice dish). I am seeing him after many years. So let me take some **poha** as a gift for him." Sudama's wife went to a neighbor and borrowed some poha. Sudama then left for Dwaraka.

When Sudama reached Krishna's palace after a few days, he told the guard, "Tell your king that his childhood friend Sudama is here." As soon as Krishna learned that Sudama was at the door of his palace, he ran out of his room. When he saw Sudama, Krishna hugged him. Krishna was so happy that his eyes became full of tears. Krishna then took Sudama inside his palace. There, Krishna asked Sudama to sit on his own throne. Then he washed Sudama's feet because Sudama had walked a long distance. He asked his queen to bring him food for Sudama and then he fed Sudama with his own hands. After dinner, the two friends started chatting about their good times when they were classmates. Suddenly, Krishna noticed that Sudama had brought a bag of **poha** as a gift. He snatched it from Sudama and started eating

it hungrily. Sudama said, "My friend Krishna, I was ashamed to give this **poha** to you. It is just ordinary food. And you are a rich king. So I thought that this gift is not good enough for you." Krishna laughed and said, "This is the best gift that I could have got. My dear friend has given this gift to me with great love."

Next morning, Sudama said goodbye to Krishna and left for his home. He was so happy because he met his friend after many years. But, Sudama never asked Krishna for any help. When Sudama reached his home after some days, he was surprised to find that his hut was no longer there. In its place, there was a mansion. Suddenly, Sudama's wife and children came out wearing beautiful clothes. His wife said, "While you were away, Krishna asked his people to make this mansion for you and us." Sudama smiled. Now he understood what a good friend Krishna was. Sudama did not even ask Krishna for help, but Krishna knew what Sudama needed, and gave it to him.

The cartoon below shows the difference between a good and a bad friend.

8. Taking Care of your Books and other Study Materials:

8.1 Why Should we take care of our Books?

We Hindus believe that books are gift of Devi Sarasvati. We become wise and intelligent when we study books under the guidance of a teacher. If we take care of our books, Devi Sarasvati is happy with us. But if we do not take care of our books, we make her unhappy. Let us see now how a good kid makes Sarasvati happy, and how a bad kid makes Sarasvati unhappy.

8.2 Hindu Traditions on Respecting our Books:

We Hindus follow these rules to take care of our books and show our respect towards them:

1. We should never place books on the floor. We should always keep them in a bag, on a table or on a shelf.
2. If we accidentally touch a book with our foot, we should pick it up and then touch the book with our head.
3. If we do not need a book, we should donate it to a library or a Mandir. Or we can recycle the book. But never throw it in trash.
4. Always touch books with clean hands. Never touch books if your hands are dirty.

The picture below shows Devi Sarasvati holding books in Her hands.

9. Attitude Toward Food

9.1 The Correct Quantity of Food:

According to Hindu scriptures, we should always eat a little less than what fills our stomach. In other words, we should eat a bit less than our appetite. We should fill 50% of our stomach with solid food, 25% with fluids (water etc.) and the rest should be kept empty. This Hindu teaching of eating less than our appetite is confirmed by modern science which says that our brain takes 20 minutes to register that we are full, even after we have eaten a sufficient amount of food! Therefore, always eat a little less than your appetite because after 20 minutes or so, the brain will actually tell you that you have eaten enough. Do not neglect to drink fluids for proper functioning of our organs and for flushing out toxins or metabolic wastes from your body.

9.2 Good and Bad Food:

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna classifies foods into three categories: Sāttvic (the best, good foods), Rajasic (the middle level foods) and the Tamasic (the bad foods). We should try to eat only Sāttvic foods and to some extent Rājasic foods. We should try to avoid Tāmasic foods. Let us read what Lord Krishna says, and try to list examples of the three types of foods. Let us also consider some cases where we might have to eat foods which are not Sāttvic.

GITA VERSE	**EXAMPLES OF FOODS IN THIS CATEGORY**
<u>Krishna said:</u> Foods that increase lifespan, mental abilities, strength, health, happiness and love, which are Juicy, fatty (not too much), wholesome and hearty (filling) are dear to the Sattvic type of persons. **Gitā 17.8**	E.g. Fresh fruit
Bitter, sour, salty, very hot, spicy, dry and burning foods are desired by Rajasic persons. These foods cause distress, grief and sickness. **Gitā 17.9**	E.g. French Fries
Food that is cooked three hours or longer before consumption, has become desiccated, and also which is putrid and decomposing, Also food that is leftover and defiling (or not fit for worship), is liked by Tamasic persons. Gitā **17.10**	E.g. Frozen foods with a lot of preservatives.

Discussion: When is it OK to eat Non-Sattvic Foods?

A. Give three instances where it is OK to eat Tāmasic foods:

a. ____

b. ____

c. ____

B. Give three instances where it is OK to eat Rājasic foods:

a. ____

b. ____

c. ____

C. Write below 1 change that you will make in your eating habits so that your food is more Sattvic:

____
____
____
____
____

9.3 Avoiding Impure Food:

In the Hindu tradition, food can be considered impure due the following four causes:

1. Prohibited by the scriptures, e.g., beef.
2. Due to contamination with an unclean substance. E.g., food in which hair have fallen.
3. Food that has been polluted due to proximity with an unclean object (not actual contact) like that which has been kept in the same room as a corpse, or which is stale.
4. Food that is procured using ill-begotten wealth.

Why is it important to each food that is pure? The Upanishads explain - "When there is purity of food, the mind becomes pure; when the mind becomes pure, it remembers the Lord and by remembrance of the Lord, liberation (Moksha) is attained." ***Chhandogya Upanishad 7.26.2***

9.4 The 'Other' Types of Foods:

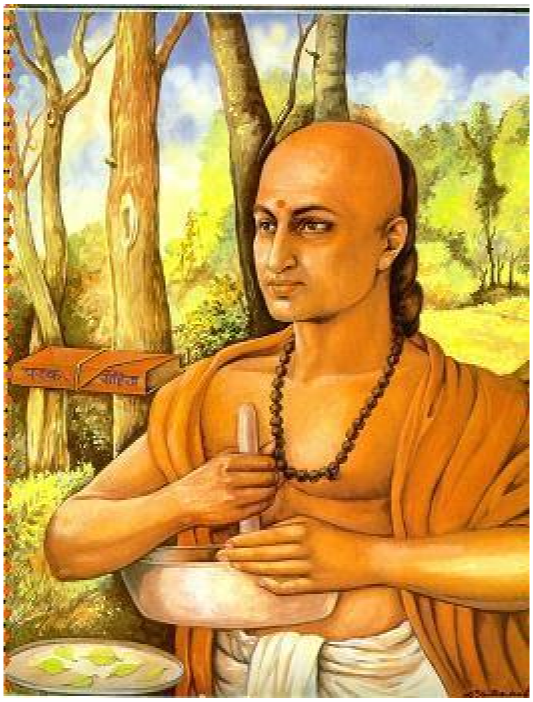
Food is not just something that we eat with our mouth. Literally, everything that we 'consume' with our senses is the food for that sense organ. The food of eyes is all the things we see, that of ears is all that we hear, that of nose is all that we smell, that of skin is all that we feel and touch.

All these foods should be pure. We must not, for instance, get addicted to 'snuff', or too 'gasoline' as some addicts do. We should not smoke or drink excessively.

9.5 Eat well and Eat a Balanced Diet; Do not stuff yourself with 'Supplements'

Story: Who is free of Disease?

Charaka Muni compiled a marvelous book on Ayurveda (Hindu medicine) in which he described hundreds of diseases, their cures, healthy lifestyles etc. Sometime after he released his book, he decided to find out if people were becoming healthier and living longer due to his efforts. Therefore, he took the form of a speaking parrot.



The parrot alighted on the branch of a tree at the center of a marketplace where a great conference of physicians was going on. The parrot started shouting, "koraruk?" (meaning, "who becomes sick?" in Sanskrit). All the physicians heard the parrot's cry. All tried to answer the question to demonstrate who was more knowledgeable in Ayurveda.

The first physician replied, "Only he who eats the nutritious supplement called 'chyavanapraasha' stays healthy." The second physician retorted, "No, you are wrong! It is the ash of burnt metals mixed with the blue berry that keeps the stomach healthy." The third physician said, "Of course not! One must eat the Chandraprabhavati to fight sickness." And the fourth disagreed with all the three and recommended the Ashvagandhā mixture.

Their answers really disappointed Charaka. He flew away, thinking, "I did not compile my book on Ayurveda to make every human being's stomach a warehouse of medicines!" He went around and asked the same question. "koraruk," to every physician he had met, but got similar disappointing replies.

Finally, he sat on a tree below which was sitting a famous physician Vāgbhatta, who had just taken his bath. “Koraruk?” asked the parrot. Vāgbhatta was really amused to see a parrot say a question that is so important to physicians. And he replied, “hitabhuk (he who eats only those foods which benefit our body), mitabhuk (he who eats only controlled amounts of food), ritabhuk (he who is not a slave to taste, and does not fill his stomach with junk food).” When the parrot heard the reply, “hitabhuk, mitabhuk, ritabhuk,” he was very pleased. Charaka Muni now assumed his normal human form and appeared in front of Vāgbhatta. “You alone have understood the secret of medicine, dear Vāgbhatta.”

The moral of the story is that instead of stuffing our body with medicines, supplements, we should rather eat a healthy and a controlled diet. We should eat to live, not live to eat!

9.6 Food is a Gift from Bhagavān, so treat it with Respect

Story: King Prithu Milks Mother Earth

King Prithu was crowned by many Sages to rule the earth. But he found it very difficult to take care of

the people in his kingdom. There were famines all the time. Rains did not come on time. All trees and plants were drying up. Cattle did not have anything to eat and were starving. As a result, his people were dying because they had no food to eat.

Prithu became very angry with Mother Earth for causing all this suffering to his people. He thought that earth was hiding all the grains and plants inside her instead of letting them grow on the soil outside. He decided to shoot an arrow into the heart of earth and break her open so that people could get the food that the earth had hidden in her.

He was about to take aim, when Mother Earth became scared. She took the form of a cow with King Prithu in hot pursuit. The King followed her wherever she went and did not give up. Finally, the cow begged him not to kill her. King Prithu then asked her why she was not yielding any food for his subjects?

Mother Earth replied – “Bhagavān took the form of Brahmā and created plants and food crops so that they can live and also lead a life of good conduct and discipline. But instead, people are just growing food, eating it, and exploiting the natural resources for their physical comforts alone. They have forgotten to thank Bhagavān by performing worship and religious ceremonies. They are not doing their duties of charity and sharing. I was scared that human beings will finish

off all the food in the world by just eating it, and not using any part of their food for doing worship and charity. Therefore, I hid whatever food was left inside me."

Mother earth told him that she would yield food again only if someone worthy brought a calf and a pitcher and start milking her. He must also level the earth and create irrigation systems so that all the rain water does not just get washed into the ocean. King Prithu agreed that people had taken the earth for granted and had forgotten her true importance. She had been abused, mistreated and harassed by everyone. He ensured that this will not happen again. So he called the Sages, the Devas etc., and they all milked her in the presence of Indra and other Devatās serving as calves. There was plentiful food and riches on the earth once again, after Mother Earth was ensured that she would be respected and cared for by people who eat the food given by her.

Moral of the Story:

1. *Food is not just something that we eat to satisfy hunger or satisfy our tastes. It is a gift from* Bhagavān. *Food is precious. It is holy. We should see food as a means of doing worship, and for doing good karma.*
2. *We should take care of mother earth while growing food on her. We should not abuse or over-use our natural resources. Rather, we should conserve them as much as we can.*

How do we Hindus show that the food is sacred? Practical Lessons

1. We pray to Bhagavān, offer a little food to Him and thank Him for giving us food before we eat it ourselves. The verse recited as prayer is Bhagavad Gita 4.24.
2. We eat and touch food only with our right hands (if we are right-handed) or with our left hands (if we are left handed).
3. We never place food on the floor. We always place the utensil containing our food on a table or a stool.
4. We eat food with decency, without talking and laughing out aloud while eating, or focusing more on the TV than on the food.
5. We should not litter food all over. We should show good table manners while eating.
6. We eat our food cheerfully, even if it is not delicious. We should not keep complaining how bad-tasting the food is.
7. We do not throw away food. Take in your plate only as much as you can eat.
8. We give food in charity to poor people.

9.7 Do not Waste Food

Story: Krishna fills his stomach with a single Grain of Rice

While the Pandavas were in the forest during their exile, it was very tough for them to find enough food and water to keep their stomachs full. But all of them were very noble and worshipped God regularly. Pleased with their good conduct, Surya Devata (the Sun) gave Draupadi a magical cooking vessel. Once Draupadi cooked in this magic vessel, she could feed an unlimited number of guests without running out of food until she had eaten herself. So, a lot of Sages and poor guests started visiting them and the Pandava brothers fed them all with love and respect. They never ran out of food, and their guests

blessed the brothers, Draupadi and Queen Kunti for their generosity. One day, just after Draupadi had eaten herself, Sage Durvasa arrived with his students for a meal. Draupadi panicked, because she had eaten her own meal and the vessel had therefore become empty. Moreover, Sage Durvasa had anger issues. Draupadi was worried that if she turned him away without feeding him, he would curse her and her family. As a result of the curse, some harm will come their way.

Durvasa told Draupadi to get the food ready while he and his students went for a bath in the nearby river. When they left, Draupadi started praying to Lord Krishna to come and help her. In a minute, Krishna appeared. But surprisingly, he too asked Draupadi to feed him lunch as soon as he came in! Draupadi told him that she had no food left, and had actually prayed to him so that he could help her in feeding Sage Durvasa and his students. Krishna said, “Draupadi, you have not run out of food. Let us go and look into the magical cooking vessel that you have.” When they went into the kitchen, Lord Krishna said – “Look, there is a grain of rice in there. So why do you say that there is no food left?” Draupadi replied – “But this is just a single grain of rice. How can we feed so many people with it?”

Krishna smiled. He picked that grain of rice and popped it into his mouth. As he ate that grain, Sage Durvasa and his students suddenly felt that their stomachs had filled up and they were no longer hungry. But they did not want to go back to Draupadi and tell her that she had worked hard to cook food unnecessarily. So they just decided to scoot from there.

A) Give 3 examples of wastage of food that we see every day:

1.____
____

2.____
____

3.____
____

B) Give 3 choices that you will make in your life to stop or reduce wastage of food

1. ____
2. ____
3. ____

10. Balanced Sleeping and Recreation Habits

10.1 How much Sleep do we need?

In teenage years, our bodies are young and they have a lot of stamina and strength. Many teenagers like to stay awake late in the night to do their homework, chat with their friends, text, surf the net, watch TV, play video games, read and so on. Late nights once in a while are OK. But when you sleep late day after day, it has a negative impact on your health. Sometimes, this negative effect does not show immediately, but it definitely shows up sometime later in your life.

Science suggests that we should sleep 7-9 hours every day. Some people need more than 9 hour sleep every day. Others can manage with 6 hours only. But in general, we should not sleep less than 6 hours or more than 9 hours every day.

On the other hand, some people sleep just too much. They just lie down in the bed out of laziness even if they are not falling asleep. The rule of thumb is that if you have been tossing in the bed for 30 minutes or more without falling asleep, it is time to get up and do some useful work instead of just lying down.

Why do we need Sleep? Sleep recharges the brain and unclogs it after a day of activity. It is like defragmenting a computer drive, or 'cleaning' the drive. When we are awake, the mind is multi-tasking by responding to the activities of all our senses, plus think and analyzing, plus storing information (memory) plus keeping our internal organs working. It gets tired too! When we sleep, it only has to keep our organs functioning, and the so it can repair itself. Sleeping too little can cause severe side-effects on our health. We can get heart disease, inflammation in our body, acid reflux, bad breath, suffer from inattentiveness, irritableness and so on.

What is the best time to sleep? Also, studies have shown that the best time to sleep is actually the night-time and not the day-time. People who work in night-shifts and therefore sleep in day time have a greater possibility of getting fatigued. In fact, night-shift workers are given a slightly higher pay for this reason.

There is almost a stereotype that smugglers, gangsters, mafia and so on party late into the night. You'd hardly ever hear someone say that smugglers habitually get up early in the morning! Hindu scriptures teach us that to advance spiritually, we should follow the dictum "early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy wealthy and wise." Early morning, just before the sun-rise, the environment is relatively pollution free, there is hardly any surrounding noise and the mind is full of positive energy. This is the best time to meditate, and study scriptures or recite our prayers.

Therefore, if we want to advance spiritually, or even materially, we should cultivate the habit of sleeping a good 7-9 hours regularly, going to bed early and getting up a little before sunrise if possible.

Discussion:

What are the mean reasons that keep you awake late into the night? What changes will you do in your life to make sure that you can sleep on time and wake up early in the morning?

____

____

____

10.2 Healthy Recreation Habits

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," according to a proverb. We all need rest and diversion from our daily activities. We can get recreation through exercise, sports, reading books, watching television, talking to friends etc.

But in all these cases, once again, Krishna advises us to be balanced in the Bhagavad Gita. The purpose of recreation is to recharge our minds and bodies so that we can practice do our work again again. Even exercise should be done on moderation, depending on the needs and the capacity of our own body. Scriptures of Hindu medicine (Ayurveda) even specify how many push-ups etc we should do to derive the optimum benefit. Too much exercise can even have a detrimental effect not only on the physical but also on the mental health.

On the other hand, no recreation can make us sick mentally and physically. When we participate in a recreation activity, or exercise, our body releases endomorphins, that make our brain feel 'happy' and promotes positive moods, in addition to strengthening our heart and other organs.

Why should kids limit their time on TV?

Watching a TV is a passive act. We see and hear whatever is given to us on the screen involuntarily for hours while watching a TV. We do not have a freedom to think creatively, or make a 'choice' while doing so. Watching TV excessively also takes us far away from the real world. We start believing that whatever is being shown in the TV is what really happens in real life, which is not true of course. Therefore, prolonged addiction to TV can distort our intellect and thinking.

11. Good Study Habits

11.1 The Characteristics of a Good Student

In the Mahabharata, a verse describes the following five habits of a good student:

> "A good student has these five traits – First, he keeps trying like a crow. Second, he is focused like an Indian egret bird. Third, he is attentive even in his sleep like a dog. Fourth, he is willing to go away from his home for the sake of his studies. And fifth, he eats little (i.e., a balanced diet, not a glutton)."

We have already studied the virtues of a balanced diet earlier. Let us now look at some other good habits with the help of stories from the Hindu tradition.

11.2 Focusing on Studies

Story: Arjuna shoots the eye of the bird

Dronacharya was the teacher of both the five Pandava brothers and the hundred Kaurava brothers. He taught the princes the military skill of archery. One day, Dronacharya decided to find out who among his students was the best archer.

He placed a wooden sparrow on the branch of the tree. The eye of the sparrow was made of a sparkling gem. He told the princes that First, he called Yuddhisththira to take aim and asked him, "You have to shoot the eye of the bird. Take aim and tell me what you can see." Yuddhishthira replied, "Sir, I have taken aim and my arrow will hit its mark. I can see you, my brothers and cousins, the trees and the bird." Dronacharya was disappointed, "Step back, and let Duryodhana make an attempt."

He asked the same question to Duryodhana, who replied, "I have taken aim dear teacher. I can see you all, the tree, and also our palace behind the tree. I can also see the grass, sky and the birds flying over us." Dronacharya replied, "Please step back, because you cannot hit the target."

One by one, Dronacharya called all the princess but asked them to step back without allowing them to shoot at the target. Then, he called Arjuna and said, “Take aim, and tell me what you see.” Arjuna replied, “I see only the eye of the parrot that I have to hit. I do not see anything else.”

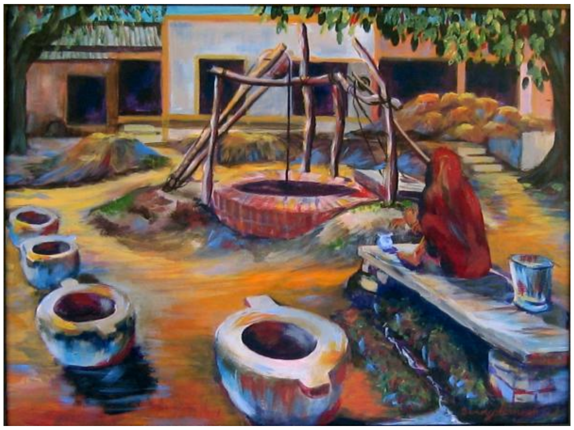
Dronacharya was very pleased. He said, “My child, you alone of all princes have one-pointed concentration. I am confident that you will hit your target successfully. Shoot!” Arjuna took aim, and his arrow pierced the eye of the wooden bird successfully. All the princes marveled at the marksmanship of Arjuna. In the course of time, as expected, Arjuna became the best archer of his times.

Discussion: What are the things that distract you from focusing on your studies?

11.3 Persistent Efforts like a crow:

A crow keeps diving from the air till it is able to grab that morsel of food on the ground with its beak. In a similar way, a good student keeps trying to understand his lesson till he succeeds.

Story: How Varadarāja became a Scholar



Several hundred years ago, there lived a child named Varadarāja. He was not a very intelligent child. He never understood anything that his teacher taught him.

The other students in his class made fun of him and called him a dumb boy. One day, Varadarāja got so upset because of this constant teasing by his classmates that he decided to end his life. He wanted to drown himself in the well on the way to his home. Just as he was about to jump into the well, he noticed something. On the stone wall around the well, there was a deep, straight mark. The mark was caused by the rope that rubbed against the stone when buckets of water were drawn up from the well.

Varadarāja thought to himself: “This stone is so hard, and the rope is so soft. But, when this rope keeps rubbing against the stone, it causes a mark even on the hard material of the stone. Likewise, if I keep practicing my teacher’s school lessons at home, my dumb mind may also become intelligent and I will start understanding everything one day!”

Varadarāja became very happy as he thought this. He decided not to jump into the well, and started studying hard at home every day after his school was over. Soon, Varadarāja became very intelligent and knowledgeable. In fact, after a few years, he became one of the greatest scholars of Sanskrit language, and wrote a grammar called ‘Laghusiddhānta Kaumudi’ which is studied by Sanskrit scholars even today.

11.4 Not Addicted to Eating or Sleeping & Not Wasting Time

Story: Arjuna catches up with the missed lesson

Once, all the Pandava and Kauravas complained that their Guru favored Arjuna too much. Drona decided to test all of them. He sent Arjuna for an errand. As soon as he left, Drona started teaching the other princes how to take aim at the exact leaf and shoot it successfully with an arrow and bow. Then, all of them left that site even before Arjuna returned.

When Arjuna returned to that spot, he found a lot of split leaves and immediately realized that he must have missed that important lesson. So in his free time, he started practicing target practicing using the leaves as his target. In this way, Arjuna soon made up for the missed lesson. When the Princes learned how Arjuna worked hard to make up for the missed lesson, they realized why their teacher used to treat Arjuna as his favorite student.

Story: Arjuna learns how to shoot in the dark

Once while Bheema, the glutton brother, was eating, the lamp blew out and it became dark. Bheema was of course still able to eat. So Arjuna thought – "If Bheema can eat in the dark, should I not be able to aim and hit my target by in the dark if the target makes a sound?" He immediately stopped eating and started practicing archery skills in the dark. But this was a difficult skill to master. So Arjuna even cut on his sleep time to practice even more. In the course of time, Arjuna learned to shoot in the dark by following the sound of his target! In fact, one of Arjuna's names was 'Gudakesha', which has several meanings one of which is "He who has mastered sleep."

This ability to shoot in the dark saved Arjuna's life later, during the Mahabharata war. He was able to shoot and kill the enemy Jayadratha during a solar eclipse by hearing his voice when everyone else would have been blinded.

11.5 Willing to leave Home for the Sake of Education

Story: Arjuna Leaves his family during their Exile to Acquire Divine Weapons

When the Pandavas had to live several years in the forest due to Duryodhana's trickery, Arjuna decided to use his time constructively and learn some new skills, and the science and art of using more advanced weapons. So he left his family for a year to go to learn weaponry from Bhagawan Shiva after an arduous journey away from his family.

This knowledge and the possession of Divine weapons by Arjuna was one of the main reasons why the Pandavas were able to defeat the Kauravas during the war. Arjuna could have just stayed with his family during the exile, but using an excuse, he left them for a year and used that time to learn special skills in the art of war.

11.6 Apply what has been Learned

According to Hindu scriptures, knowledge is mastered in four steps: The first 25% is mastered when we learn it from the teacher. The next 25% is mastered when we reflect upon what we have learned. The third 25% is mastered when we apply what we have learned. And finally, the last 25% is learned when we teach what we have learned to others.

Story: Yudhishthira does not Complete his Homework[14]

Yudhishthira, the eldest of the Pandavas, was born by the grace of Yamaraj. From young age he was a follower of dharma and so later in life was known as Dharmaraj. Yamaraj is the god of death but also known as lord of justice or dharma. Naturally Yudhisthira displayed these qualities. When the Pandavas were young, their Guru, Acharya Drona, taught them their first lesson - Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara (Speak the truth, follow your dharma).

Yudhishthira asked his Guru, "What is Dharma?"

Acharya Drona replied, "Dharma means, speaking the truth, living by loving others, being kind and merciful."

Yudhistira then asked "What is Adharma?"

Guru replied "Speaking lies, showing anger and to hate others is Adharma."

Then next day Acharya Drona began by revising the previous lesson on 'satyam vada, dharmam chara' and one by one all the pupils stood up and repeated, "Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara". Yudhishthira did not stand up to repeat the lesson.

Acharya Drona asked Yudhishthira if he had learnt the lesson and but he said that he had not learnt the lesson. So Drona asked Yudhishthira to learn the lesson for next day. Then the next day, all pupils remembered their lesson but Yudhishthira replied that he had not learnt the lesson. Eventually when Yudhishthira kept on repeating that he had not learnt the lesson, Acharya Drona became angry and gave Yudhishthira a beating.

Yudhishthira calmly took the beating and Guru Drona then asked have still not learnt the lesson. Yudhishthira replied "I have now learnt the lesson."

Guru Drona and all pupils looked surprised. Acharya Drona asked, "How did you learn the lesson today?"

Yudhishthira replied, "Acharaya, you told us to speak the truth, and to love others is dharma; to speak a lie and to show anger is adharma. I used to lie in fun without meaning it. I used to become angry too. Therefore I used to say that I do not know the lesson. Today after my punishment, I am not angry with you and I love you just the same. Therefore I have learnt the lesson."

11.7 Time Management and Efficient Use of Time

Everyone has got only 24 hours in a day. No one gets 25 or more hours, and likewise gets less than 24. But some people succeed and life and others do not. One of the key reasons for this difference is the fact that successful people always spend their time wisely and do not waste it in trivial things like chatting away on the phone, texting uselessly to their friends, surfing the net or doing other things without any gain or purpose. Instead, they plan out their day and make a list of things that they'd like to do during that day. Then, they make a sincerely attempt to compete these tasks.

But in a given day, we can do only a limited number of tasks. Therefore, successful people make a list of everything that they'd like to do, and then prioritize their list. This means, this list their tasks in the order of importance, so that they can get the most important tasks done first.

The third characteristic of successful people is that they are not procrastinators ('deerghasūtrī' as the Bhagavad Gita calls them) and try to complete their task immediately without delay and postponement.

[14] Reproduced from http://www.sarathi.co.uk/culture_basic_hinduism.htm

SECTION III

CONQUERING OUR SIX ENEMIES AND OTHER EVILS

12. The Six Internal Enemies

12.1 The Six Internal Enemies of Human Beings

Most of us tend to blame others for our own failures and unhappiness. But Hindu Dharma teaches us that it is very easy but wrong to blame others for all of our problems. Most of the time, our problems are our own, and are our own fault.

This is because we have not done enough to fight our true enemies, which are not other people but which are right inside us. But what are these six internal enemies? Hindu scriptures tell us that Bhagavan is perfect, and He is therefore free of these six enemies, which are listed below:

> "He [Bhagavan Vishnu] does not have the group of six enemies namely Kāma (desire and lust), Krodha (anger), Lobha (greed), Moha (delusion), Mada (Ego and pride), Mātsarya (Jealousy, excessive competition)." **Mudgala Upanishad**

No matter how powerful, rich, successful or outwardly happy we are, we cannot be considered mature if we have not conquered these six internal enemies. In fact, Hindu Dharma says that we will never be truly happy and peaceful within our hearts unless we defeat these six enemies – the 'Shadripus.'

It is also meaningless to practice 'good behaviors' if we have not conquered the Shadripus. For example, speaking a truth that is motivated by greed is inferior to a speaking it without any desire for wealth. Who is superior – a man who calls the police to tell them the whereabouts of wanted criminal to get a reward, or a man who does so even though there is no bounty offered for the criminal's arrest?

The concept of Shadripus in Hindu Dharma makes us responsible for our own successes and failures. In the Gita, Bhagavān Krishna says –

> "One should uplift oneself by oneself; one should not degrade oneself. Indeed, the mind alone is the friend of oneself and mind alone is one's enemy". **Gita 6.5**

No enemy can cause any more harm than one's own mind. One can protect oneself against physical or emotional injury by others, but protection against one's harmful thoughts, attitudes and feelings is not an easy task. However if one is committed to one's own growth and maturity, there is no better friend than oneself. One becomes one's own benefactor doing what needs to be done to tackle the six fold enemies within the mind is of prime importance in facilitating one's inner growth.

Therefore Upanishads also say –

> "The mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation (moksha) in humans. When attached to sense objects, the mind brings bondage. When detached from objects, it brings freedom." **Maitrayaniya Upanishad 4.6**

These six enemies may be manifest in one's behavior or may remain unmanifest for a long time till an occasion or situation arises and the inherent nature becomes manifest. Sometimes when they do manifest one may still remain unconscious of them. For example, one may ignore another person out of anger, but may not be aware of the angry feelings that caused one to ignore that person! These weaknesses of the mind cause discomfort and sorrow to oneself and others. They also hamper one's emotional growth and maturity. To overcome these weaknesses, one has to recognize their presence in the mind. One has to examine what gives rise to these qualities and sustains them and whether or not they are legitimate. When one begins to appreciate the illegitimacy of these 6 enemies, one will not ever be bound by them.

12.2 Relationship between the Six Enemies:

Note that these six enemies are not entirely independent of each other. But they are all united against us and want to destroy us completely! For example, it is not possible for a person to be jealous and at the same time be free of anger completely, because jealousy inevitably gives rise to feelings of anger towards our external 'enemy'. Another example is that excessive greed for money is itself caused by excessive desire, and it can lead to a feeling of pride or ego when that person does become rich. So here, we have 3 of the six enemies (desire, greed and pride) that are united against us.

Bhagavan Krishna explains one of the possible relationships between some of these six enemies in the following verses. He shows how these shadripus (desire, anger, delusion) overpower the critical and discriminating ability of our intellect (buddhi) due to which we forget the purpose of our life, and then they destroy us completely.

> "Dwelling or thinking on the objects of the senses a man develops attachment for them. From attachment, desire is born. Desire gives rise to anger. From anger arises delusion. From delusion arises a failure of memory (i.e. forgetting who I am and what the purpose of my life is). From failure of memory results a destruction of the intellect; and through the destruction of intellect, total destruction ensues." **Bhagavad Gita 2.62-63**

When an individual experiences an object it may or it may not leave an impression in one's mind. If one thinks about the object again it does become an impression. If one continues to dwell upon or associate with the object, desire is born to re-experience it (candy, pop, drugs), or even to possess it. Then the person acts to fulfill that desire. The more intense the desire, the greater becomes the need to fulfill it. Whatever comes in the way of fulfilling the desire evokes anger.

This 8 step ladder of downfall can be illustrated with the help of the following example:

Step #	***Name of the step***	***E.g. A kid and chocolate***
1	Thought	"I am thinking about chocolate"
2	Attachment	"I like chocolate"
3	Desire	"I want chocolate"
4	Anger	"I am angry that my mother is not giving me a chocolate."

5	Delusion (losing touch with reality)	"If my mother really loved me, she would have given me the chocolate."
6	Loss of Memory (forgetting who we are)	The boy starts abusing her mother because she would not give him chocolate, forgetting that he is supposed to respectful towards her.
7	Destruction of discrimination	"Mom, if you do not give me chocolate, I will hit you."
8	He perishes	The kid attacks his mom, is arrested and lands up in a juvenile correction prison.

12.3 Expressions of the Six Enemies

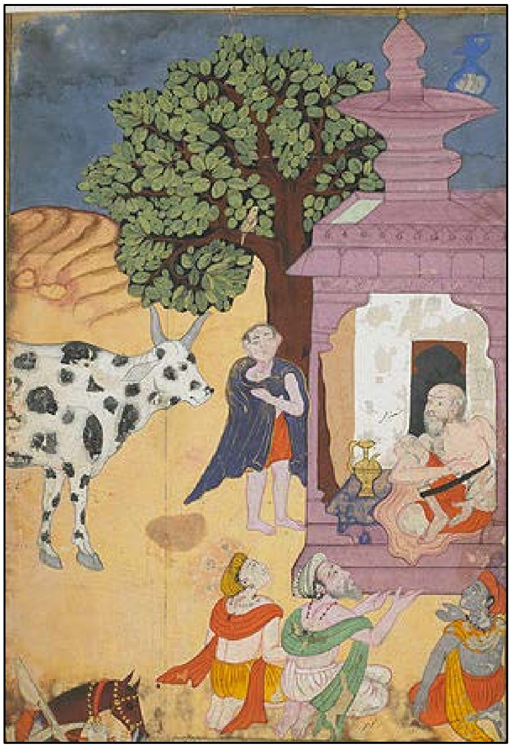
The six enemies can in our mind, our speech or in our actions. For example, take Anger. We can be angry in our mind when we see a misbehaving friend. We can go a step further, and yell at him. Or we can start hitting him physically or give him a mean look.

Or take greed. We can covet someone's new video game in our mind. Or we can nag that person saying, "You need to share it with me or I won't like you anymore." Or we can show our greed physically by snatching or stealing the video game from him.

In general, it is better to restrict our six enemies to our mind and speech (and not act under their influence), and even better to restrict them to our mind and not speak or act under their influence. The best is to free our mind, speech and body completely of their influence, and conquer these six enemies.

Let us now study about these enemies one by one. But before that, we will read the famous story of the conflict between Rishis Vashishtha and Vishwamitra because it involves all these sixe enemies.

Story: How King Vishvaratha Conquered the Six Enemies and became Brahmarshi Vishvamitra



King Vishvaratha (the name means "whose chariot has tread victoriously over the entire earth", i.e,, a powerful Emperor) was once on a hunting expedition with his entourage. They felt very tired and hungry after a long day of hunting activity and were looking for a place to rest and cook food. They happened to come across a small hermitage of Brahmarshi Vashishtha. The Sage greeted them with open arms and enquired about their needs. After learning of their needs, he asked the celestial cow Kāmadhenu (cow of plenty) to do what was necessary to make the guests comfortable. Kāmadehenu, a wish cow, produced all the food that the army could eat. Vishvaratha was amazed at the powers of the cow.

Smitten with lobha (greed) to have Kāmadehenu, Vishvaratha argued with Vashishtha that his cow would be

more useful to him in feeding his large number of people, whereas Vashishtha would fill the needs of his small hermitage with perhaps a few ordinary cows. He offered as many cows as Vashishtha wanted, in return for Kāmadhenu. But Vashishtha told Vishvaratha that the divine cow could only remain with one who had realized the Truth and besides, such a cow could not be commanded as an object of possession. But bitten by the bug of greed and having been rebuffed by Vashishtha, Vishvamitra became very angry (krodha) and started a fight. His rational thinking was completely overwhelmed by anger. During the fight, Kāmadehunu produced many soldiers and weapons and Vishvamitra's army was defeated. The arrogance (mada) of Vishvaratha (after all, he is a king) led him to challenge Vashishtha directly. But all the weapons that Vishvaratha could hurl at Vashishtha were swallowed by the Sage's staff (brahmadanda) of Vashishtha. In the end, Vishvaratha himself was felled by the brahmadanda. Seeing the plight of the mighty king, Rishi Vashishtha, who was a man of great compassion and kindness, forgave the king.

Vishvaratha felt humiliated and insulted. He resolved to learn the Truth by doing Tapas. He decided to renounce his family and kingdom and meditate in order to realize the truth. He also entertained the idea that by doing tapas, he would acquire enough powers to retaliate against Vashishtha. How ironic that the thought of retaliation was buried deep in him even while he took the decision to meditate on the Truth!

Vishvaratha did not know the fundamentals of meditation. He could have gone to Vashishtha or another Guru for proper initiation. But his ego was so big that he would not do so. By sheer will power, he focused his mind on Bhagavan Shiva. The intensity of his prayers produced tremendous heat from his head and the billowing smoke travelled towards the sky. Indra, the head of the Devatās in heaven, was very worried that Vishvaratha would acquire great Yogic powers and would be a menace to all. In order to disturb Vishvaratha's concentration, he sent a divine nymph named Menaka to the place where Vishvaratha was meditating. Menaka was a beautiful and an exquisite dancer. Her song and dance disturbed Vishvaratha's concentration. Opening his eyes, he saw this beautiful woman and immediately, his Kāma (lust or desire) made him fall in love with her. Forgetting his resolve to realize the Truth, he married Menaka. Soon thereafter, they were the parents of a baby girl Shakuntala. One day, Vishvaratha recalled his original goal and decided to leave Menaka and the child and return to the depths of the forest to resume his austerities. Menaka too left for her home in the skies, and left the daughter Shakuntala in the hermitage of Rishi Kanva, who brought her up as his own daughter.

Vishvaratha now resumed his austerities with even greater concentration and prayed with greater

devotion. The ensuing heat from his austerities made Indra very nervous. This time, he sent another celestial nymph named Rambha to distract Vishvaratha. When Vishvaratha got distracted from his deep concentration, he opened his eyes and saw Rambha. This time, instead of Kāma, Krodha (anger) tool hold of him. Infuriated by her distractions, he cursed Rambha and cursed her into a stone. All the powers that he had acquired as a result of his austerities were dissipated in a moment of anger. Not wanting to give up his determination to humiliate Vashishtha, Vishvaratha resumed his austerities.

During that time, there was a king named Trishanku who wanted to reach heaven in his human body. The performance of the Vedic Yajna was a way he could have fulfilled his request. He went to his Guru Vashishtha and requested him to officiate as the priest in the Yajna. But Vashishtha refused Trishanku's request. He said that Hindu scriptures prohibit going to heaven in one's present earthly body. Disappointed at the turn of events, Trishanku approached Vishvaratha with his request. Now Vishvaratha thought that this is the right opportunity to humiliate Vashishtha. He did not consider the fact that no one can ascend to heaven in his earthly body, and was overpowered by the delusion (moha) that he could somehow do this for Trishanku. Therefore, he agreed to perform the Yajna for Trishanku.

By the power of the Yajna performed by Vishvaratha, Trishanku started rising from the earth and ascended towards heaven. Seeing this improbable sight, the Devatās wanted to push Trishanku from reaching heaven and they pushed him back towards the earth. When Vishvaratha saw this, he stopped Trishanku in mid-air and created a new heaven for him. This is called Trishanku heaven and the shines as a star in the sky even today. Vishvaratha realized that no one can ascend to heaven in one's earthly body and by realizing that spiritual things are different from earthly things, he overcame his delusion. But as he had promised to Trishanku that he will take him to heaven, he created this parallel heaven.

Once again, Vishvaratha had used up all his powers having been overpowered with Moha. He resolved to try regaining them once again through austerities. Pleased with his devotion, Bhagavān Brahmā appeared to him and blessed him with the title 'Maharshi.' But Vishvaratha was infuriated with this and said out of jealousy, "Just a Maharshi? I deserved the higher title of Brahmarshi." But Brahmā said, "You can get that title and status only if you are blessed by Brahmarshi Vashishtha.

Now Vishvaratha really got frustrated but his mada (ego) did not allow him to go to Vashishtha and ask for his blessings. He was overcome with anger and mātsarya (jealousy) towards Vashishtha, and he decided to kill Vashishtha to eliminate all competition! Armed with a big rock, he waited at night outside the door of Vashishtha's hut, thinking that he will hurl the stone at Brahmarshi Vashishtha the moment he comes out. He waited and waited. In the early hours of the morning, he heard Vashishtha saying to his wife, "Vishvaratha is a great man and is fully qualified to be a Brahmarshi. In fact, he is greater than myself. I do not know why he has not come to see me yet." When Vishvaratha heard these words of praise from none other than the person he hated out of jealousy, he felt very repentant. His feelings of jealousy, anger, frustration and ego disappeared for good. He went inside the hut and fell at Brahmarshi Vashishtha's feet and said, "I had tried to kill you several times. Just to insult you, I tried several austerities. But despite that, you did not harbor any ill-will towards me. Look at me – I had come to kill you. But instead, I learn how much you respect me. What a despicable person I am. I hope my tears of repentance will make you forgive me."

Vashishtha said, “Every person has six enemies – lust/desire, anger, greed, arrogance or ego, delusion and jealousy. You have overcome each one of them. You were led astray many times in your pursuit of Truth, but you never gave up. Finally, you conquered jealousy as well. I bless you and indeed, you are also a Brahmarshi from now on.” As Vashishtha said these words, Devi Gāyatri appeared in front of Vishvaratha and gave him the Gāyatri Mantra, chanting which everyone in this world can come closer to Bhagavān. From that day, Vishvaratha became Vishvamitra (the friend of the entire world). He became an eternal emperor in the true sense of the word, because his name became associated with the holiest mantra of Hindus.

In conclusion, let us try to recognize the six defects of the mind. Let us enquire, analyze and see the foolishness of these defects. Once we see them for what they are, they simply drop out of our mind. The way to conquer them is through knowledge gained by right understanding and not by suppressing them. Let us therefore try our best in our daily life not to get dominated by these defects. A mind that is relatively free of these modifications is a mind that is quiet, capable of rational thinking and ready to realize its full potential.

13. Kāma (Desire): The First Enemy

13.1 What is Kāma? Why is it important to control Kāma?

Desire means doing any action mentally, verbally, or physically to make our sense organs 'happy' or satisfied.

Desire is the most dangerous of the six enemies. We learned about the 8 step ladder of downfall earlier, and saw that desire appears pretty early on in that list. In fact, Krishna says that controlling our desires is the key to save ourselves from ruin.

Lord Krishna says in the very next verse after describing the ladder of fall (Gita 2.64):

> *"But a self-controlled man, moving among objects (of enjoyment), with his senses under restraint, and free from both attraction and repulsion (from sense objects), attains peace."* **Gita 2.64**

In other words, Lord Krishna stresses the importance of controlling our senses if we do not want to go down the ladder of fall.

13.2 The Eight Forms of Desire:

There are eight main forms of desires – one each for the 5 organs of perception, 2 related to our mind, and the 8th related to our body.

"1. **Words**: Words we hear and read. And sounds we hear (for example, music) give us pleasure; this is happiness through words.

2. **Touch:** Meeting friends and family, hot and cold, soft and hard touch gives us feeling of happiness through the sense of touch.

3. **Form:** Different forms of the world like beautiful buildings, oceans, mountains, forests, watching TV, movies, games etc., give us pleasure. Such joy is the pleasure through forms.

4. **Rasa**: Sweetness, hot, sour etc., tastes give us pleasure gained from tasting with tongue.

5. **Smell**: Beautiful fragrance of flowers, perfumes etc., give us the pleasure gained through our sense of smell.

6. **Māna** (exaggerated self-respect): When someone or in some place, respect is shown to us, it gives pleasure to our ego.

7. **Glory:** When we hear glory of our name, we feel happy; this is happiness arising from glory.

8. **Rest (being lazy):** We feel happy physically not doing anything, being lazy and just chilling."[15]

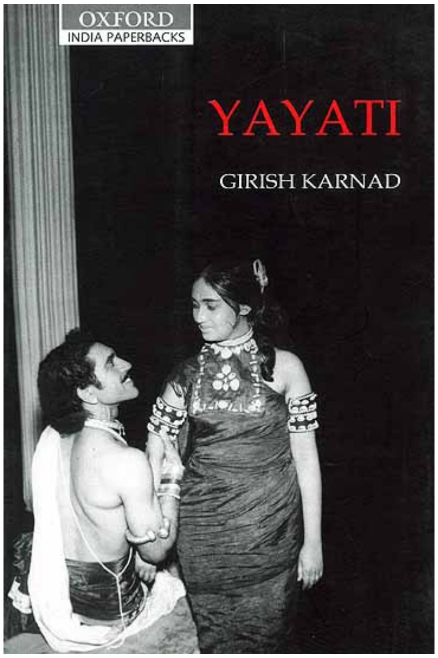
13.3 Can our Desires ever End?

The Hindu scriptures give a beautiful story to show how desires can never end if we keep fulfilling them.

STORY: Emperor Yayāti gives up Enjoyment and Turns to Dharma and Moksha

Many people say – "There is only one life. So let us enjoy. Who knows if there will be a tomorrow." Hindu scriptures narrate the story of Emperor Yayati who was devoted excessively to the pleasures of senses. Emperor Yayati had two wives and many sons. He loved to live a 'good' life, indulging in all kinds of pleasure. When he grew old, he was unable to indulge in such pleasures, but his mind still longed for them. So he asked his sons to exchange his youth for his father's old age. The first three sons refused, and out of anger, he cursed them. The fourth son Puru was very obedient and he exchanged his youth for his father's old age.

And then, Yayati lived through another youth and enjoyed pleasures of senses. When he grew old again, he realized that he was still not satisfied. Now Yayati felt very guilty that he had cursed his own sons, and deprived his own obedient son of his youth which had rightfully belonged to his son alone. And even after living a second youth, his desires for physical pleasures was not satisfied. He realized the folly of having deprived his own son of his youth, and then said the following famous verses quoted in several Hindu scriptures (Brahma Purana 10.40-46):



> *"He who withdraws within himself all pleasures like the tortoise that draws his limbs within itself is indeed a person who has attained the state of Yoga. Never does desire for pleasure subside by indulging in their enjoyment. Just as the fire blazes all the more when Ghee is poured into it, so also it increases at every indulgence.*
>
> *If one were to possess all the grains of rice and barley on the earth, if one were to possess all the gold, if one were to become the master of all the cattle wealth on the earth or if one were to marry all women on the earth--he will discover that even this is not sufficient to satiate his thirst.*
>
> *That being so, one should not be deluded by these things. When one does not have any ill will towards any living being, whether in mind, in word, or in deed, then only does one attain Brahman.*
>
> *When one is not afraid of others, when none is afraid of him, or when one does not like or dislike others too much, then alone one attains Brahman.*

[15] Hindu Culture. Grade 9 Bala Vihar Teachers' Handbook. 2011. Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy (California), Lesson 30

Happiness comes to a person who eschews greed and covetousness-- evils which can never be given up by the wicked, evils which do not become old even when one's own body becomes old and decrepit, evils which are like an ailment that comes to end only when the vital airs die out.

When a man becomes old, his hair become old, his teeth become old; but alas! Only the hope and greed for wealth and a prolonged life never grows old!

The happiness that supposedly arises from indulgence in pleasures and also the great happiness that one attains in heaven-- all these are not equal to even the 16th part of the happiness one attains when his greed is extinguished." **Brahma Purana 10. 40-46**

Yayati then decided to devote the remainder of his life to worship God, practice Yoga and understand the nature of the truth. And when he died, he went to heaven. This story shows how a blind pursuit of pleasures of the senses (tongue, eyes, ears etc.) makes us so selfish that we forget the welfare of even our closest friends and family. Therefore, we should realize that there are more important things in life – Dharma and God. These alone should be our more important goals of life. Sure, we should pursue Kama and Artha, but with the understanding that Dharma and Moksha are more important than these two.

The Seventh Jar of Gold – A Parable of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa

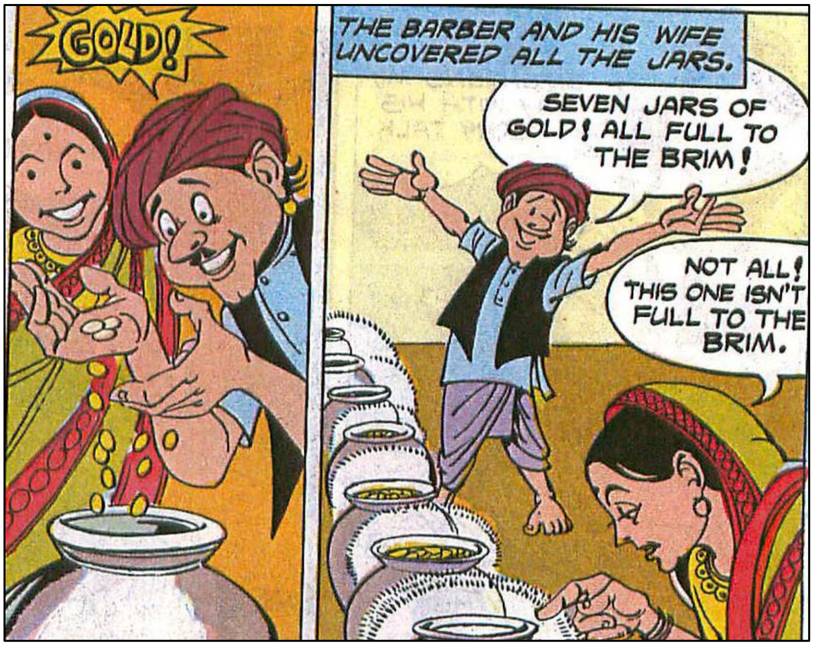
Once, a royal barber said to his wife, "My dear wife, although I am the King's personal barber, I want us to become rich. I want you to wear large gold necklaces and bracelets so that all the rich people of our town envy us. Let me go to the King today and ask him to raise my salary."

As he was on his way to the palace, he decided to rest in the shade of a tree. Suddenly, a mysterious voice from the tree said to the barber, "So you want to become rich! Well, go back home now and you will find 7 jars of gold sitting in your own courtyard." The barber was astonished to hear this voice come from nowhere. He rushed home to see that his wife stood surprised at the doorstep to tell him that some unknown person had just delivered seven large jars to their home.

"These jars have gold in them! We are rich now. Come, let us check the gold in these jars," said the barber. They opened the first six jars and found them full to the brim with gold coins. But the seventh jar was only half full!

"Hmmm, it appears that the mysterious voice on the tree did not fulfill his promise. I think I will need to fill this seventh jar of gold myself." He said to his wife, "Go and bring all your jewelry and all the gold we have in our home. Let us fill out this seventh jar." The wife responded, "But what is the need to do that? Don't we have 6-1/2 jars full already? These will last our family for generations! Moreover, if I have to sacrifice my necklaces and bracelets to fill the seventh jar, then people will think that we have become poorer!"

But the barber replied, "You just do not understand! We are just ½ a jar away from having seven full jars of gold. Yes, rich men's wives wear huge gold bracelets, rings and necklaces, but they store even a larger quantity of their gold in jars like these." So the wife returned with her ornaments, but the couple discovered that the jar was still half empty!



Now the barber got irritated and said, "From today onwards, we have to cut down on our expenses, including how much we spend on our food. We should every single bit of money and buy gold with it to fill this seventh jar!" So, the couple started eating less, and with time they grew thinner and weaker. But still, the money saved by them on their food was not sufficient to buy them enough gold to fill out the seventh jar.

The barber then went to the king, and said, "Your majesty, inflation has caused everything to cost twice of what it was a few years back. I am requesting you to double your salary. Look, I cannot even buy enough food to feed myself and my wife!" The king took pity on the barber, looking at his condition, and doubled his salary.

But months passed and still, the barber and his wife could not buy enough gold with their higher savings to fill out the seventh jar. The jar just seemed to have no bottom, because no matter how much gold they put in it, it would just not fill up! After a few months, the barber now looked even more malnourished and the King thought that he had caught some incurable disease. He summoned the barber and asked him to tell the truth about the cause of his declining health. The barber narrated him the whole story and told him about the seventh jar that would just not get full, and was always half empty. The barber ended his sad story saying, "I think I lived a more happy life when I did not have even one jar of gold. Now I have 6-1/2 jars but it is that half empty seventh jar that has just made my life so miserable!"

The King laughed and said, "You fool! That seventh jar is the jar of desire! It will never get full. A person who cannot keep his desires under his control will never get satisfied even if all the gold, diamonds, land, food, clothes, cars, mansions, electronics etc. of the whole world are gifted to him!" The barber got his lesson, and decided that he did not want even one jar of gold. He went to that tree and shouted back, "Take back your jars. I do not want any of your gold." The jars immediately disappeared from his home, and the barber then lived happily thereafter.

13.4 Are all Desires Bad?

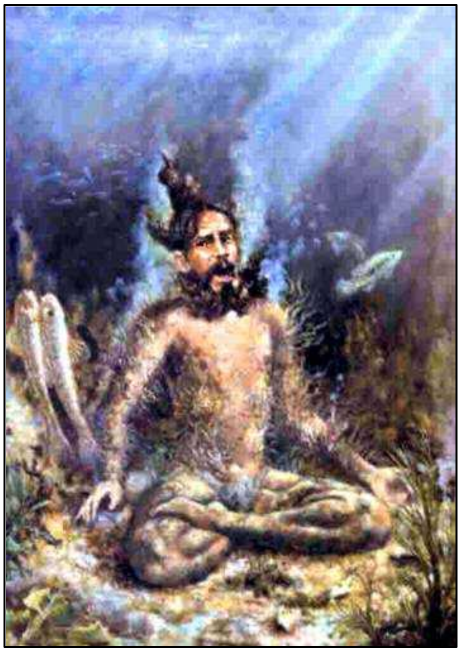
There is a common misunderstanding that all desires are a cause of bondage. While it is true that one's desires are infinite in number and therefore can never be fulfilled, to conclude that desires are binding in nature is incorrect. One need not eliminate all desires to be free. In fact, all good actions too result from desires. Rishi Manu says very appropriately –

To be motivated by desire is not to be commended, but it is impossible in this world to be free from desire, for it is desire that prompts Vedic study and the performance of Vedic rites. Intention is the root of desire; intention is the wellspring of sacrifices; and intention triggers every religious observance and every rule on restraint – so the tradition declares. Nowhere in this world do we see any activity done by a man free from desire; for whatever at all that a man may do, it is the work of someone who desired it. By engaging in them properly, a man attains the world of the immortals and, in this world, obtains all his desires just as he had intended." **Manu 2.2-5**

The key factor to evaluate is to see as to whether they are binding or non-binding. If one's happiness is dependent upon fulfilling desires, one is naturally unhappy as long as the desires are unfulfilled. Such desires are known as BINDING desires. On the other hand one whose happiness is not dependent upon fulfilling desires is said to entertain NONBINDING desires. It is only the binding desires that bring about the disappointment and sadness to the individual and needs to be addressed.

Moreover, without desire, one would not be able to act at all, since desire alone prompts action. One would not even be able to take one step if one did not have the desire or expectation to move forward. Even Lord Krishna desired that Arjuna understand as to his roles, responsibilities and duties but Lord Krishna's desires were unselfish and were not binding! Sri Krishna was at peace regardless of the outcome. It did not make any difference to his balanced mind whether his disciple Arjuna learnt or not. On the other hand Duryodhana had a binding desire to have the entire kingdom to him and also to destroy the Pandavas. Those desires led him to undertake inappropriate and unethical actions including the war which resulted in his and all Kaurava's destruction.

13.5 Desires are Difficult to Control, so be Vigilant at all Times.



We often fail to control our desires because it is not easy to master our senses and our mind. Even many Rishis have failed, so it is even more difficult for ordinary human beings to be successful.

The Shrimad Bhāgavata Purāṇa has the beautiful story of Rishi Saubhari, who decided to abandon the world and do his meditation inside water so that his mind never gets overcome by worldly attractions. But one day, he saw two fishes together and that sight was enough to make him deviate from his vow! He had decided not to marry but now seeing the fish, he suddenly had the desire to get married and have children, even though he was now a very old man.

This story shows how we must never lower our guard. Life is like a garden. To keep the garden beautiful and fresh at all times, we must constantly plant and trim our flowering plants.

But at the same time, we can never ignore the weeds that can grow and choke our flowers. Therefore, we must tend our flowers and also pluck the weeds regularly. The human mind is very fertile, like a fertilized garden. To keep it pure and beautiful, we should constantly engage ourselves in good activities (abhyāsa) and also keep making a constant effort to steer clear of bad things (vairāgya). We can never lower our guard, because it takes just a moment for negative thoughts and desires to enter our minds.

13.6 How can we control our Desires?

There are two types of solutions by which we can control our desires – Temporary and Permanent. Temporary solutions help us overcome our desires immediately and for the time being, but they cannot prevent these desires from arising again in future. They are immediate cures and are more like cold medicines that treat the symptoms but cannot treat the underlying cause of the problem. Permanent solutions are more long term and take a longer time to implement, but they result in a long lasting solution to the problem of becoming a victim of uncontrolled desires.

Both these solutions should be used. If a patient is down with a severe flu, it is useless to argue with him that he must increase the resistance by taking more Vitamin C. The best temporary solution would be to give him a medicine that makes him comfortable by keeping the symptoms of flu (e.g. fever) under control. And when his flu goes away, he can start a long term healthy life-style so that his episodes of flue become rare and more infrequent.

13.5.1 Temporary Means to Control Desires:

1. Get engaged in work immediately so that the mind does not wander off into other things. An empty mind is a devil's workshop. Keeping it engaged in useful activity does not give the mind any scope to indulge in lust and other forms of desire. Work is considered a very effective tool to keep the mind busy in more constructive things in the Hindu scriptures –

> O my mental sins, you praise non-praiseworthy things. I want you to leave me, go away from and get lost in deep forests and trees. My mind is engaged in domestic tasks and in dairy farming (therefore there is no place for you in my mind). Atharvaveda 6.45.1

2. When desires arise in the mind, go and sit in the midst of several people. The presence of people around us makes us more conscious of what we are thinking, saying and doing, and acts as a detriment in falling victim of desires. This is the psychology that many stores use to reduce shop-lifting. For instance, having a greeter at the entrance of the store sometimes makes the shoppers aware that they are being watched, and therefore they become less likely to shop-lift.
3. Reflect on the evil effects of pursuing your desires without any control (pratipaksha bhāvanā).
4. Make a conscious effect to desist from fulfilling desires. If you want to eat your 2nd chocolate, tell your mind that you will not do it.

13.5.2 Permanent Means to Keep Desires under Control:

It is very important to change our lifestyle so that we can control our sense organs which want to be satisfied through fulfillment of desires. However, we should strike a balance, depending on where are in

our life. For example, some of the means listed below cannot be followed by a family man, but are more suitable for ascetics. Manusmriti says somewhat the same, when it asks us to avoid the extremes:

> *"Without tormenting his body too much, one should try to control all his sense organs as well as the mind and thereby try to achieve all his purposes."* **Manu 2.100**

As explained above, we must never lower our guard, but should always engage ourselves in good activities and disengage ourselves from negative tendencies.

Some practical long term and permanent ways to overcome desire are:

1. **Japa:** Chant the names of Bhagavan constantly. Reflection upon the meaning of the beautiful names of Bhagavan creates in us a desire to emulate His good qualities, and give up bad qualities. This reduces our desires for trivial things in life.
2. **Swādhyāya**: Read spiritual scriptures like the Upanishads. When we study spiritual passages from our scriptures, we realize the foolishness of our desires. We understand however we hanker after things that really do not matter in life. Therefore, Rishis recommend that we should read our spiritual books regularly so that their teachings are ingrained in our mind. And if we do have a momentary lapse, specific passages are recommended for study. For example, a hymn that is recommended is Aghamarshana Sukta (Rigveda 10.190.1-3) whose third verse reads –

   > "The Lord created the sun, the moon, the heavens, the earth and the skies exactly the same way as he had created them in the previous creation." **Rigveda 10.190.3**

   Reading and reflecting on this passage makes us realize that whereas our desires give us merely momentary passage, the reality of the universe is timeless-ness. Therefore, it is foolish for us to hanker after pleasures which are really so trivial in the larger scheme of things.
3. **Ahāra-Shuddhi:** Reduce the foods that generate cravings, like chocolate, alcohol, smoking, drugs, psychedelic music etc. Best is to avoid them completely.
4. **Yukta-Vihāra:** Lead a balanced and a healthy life routine. Go to bed early and wake up early in the morning instead of going to sleep late and then getting up late the next morning. At dawn, there is least disturbance and the mind is fresh and full of pure thoughts. People whose lifestyle is such that they wake up late, and sleep late are more prone to falling prey to desires and other Shadripus because they are asleep at dawn when the mind is pure, and awake when the mind is more susceptible to evil thoughts. Have you ever heard of Mafia leader who goes to bed on time and wakes up early every day?
5. **Aranyāyana**: Residence in the solitude of a forest or in solitude. Most of the temptations occur in cities and other places where there are opportunities and possibilities for different desires to get fulfilled. Therefore, many Rishis would leave their villages and cities and set up their hut in a forest so that they are away from all worldly temptations. But, this is not a possible solution for most of us who must live in cities and villages, in the middle of all the temptations. But distancing ourselves physically from temptations, if possible, can help us overcome many desires. For example, if you are very upset for having broken up with your boyfriend, and still have a continuous desire to meet him, the solution is to move to another town, or to another neighborhood which is far away from him. The physical distance itself will help you overcome the desire in the course of time, by making it practically difficult for you to meet him.

6. **Sattrāyana or Satsanga**: Participating in an assembly of learned scholars. The company of spiritual persons and the learned distracts our mind away from petty and useless things and diverts our mental thoughts towards more meaningful things. We hear their good sermons and teachings, which makes our mind attracted towards better things. Very often, we do not believe that following the path of Dharma will result in greater happiness for us. But when we attend the company of holy men, we see for ourselves how they have benefited from their efforts. As a result, we then want to follow the path of Dharma ourselves. **The story of Swami Dayanand Saraswati below shows how he was able to demonstrate the truth of Hindu teachings to a skeptic.**
7. **Anāshakāyana:** Abiding in eternal things, i.e., disengage from impermanent things. Everything that we desire in this world will eventually perish, and we will be deprived of it one day. But there is one thing that can never leave us – our eternal soul, within which lives Bhagavān. **The story of Tulsi Das below illustrates this method of overcoming our desires.**
8. **Ishta:** Engage in tasks that benefit others. There is more joy in making others happy, than in pursuing selfish desires to please our senses. When we spend time in sevā (voluntary work) and serve scholars, the poor, hungry or needy people; or even animals, we get a real sense of satisfaction and joy that we do not get by fulfilling the cravings of our senses.
9. **Datta:** Give charity so that attachment to one's possessions can be overcome. There is a proverb in Hindi, "If there is no bamboo, how can one play the flute?" Getting rid of something to which we are really attached eventually cures us of the intense desire that we have for that object. If you are
10. **Bhakti:** Direct all the desire of your senses towards Bhagavan. This is in fact a very easy way for overcoming desires. If your eyes desire to see only the objects of beauty, then see only the mūrti of Bhagavan. If you like to smell perfumes, then sit in a Puja where incense is being burned. If you like to listen to certain things, direct your hearing to devotional music. **The story of Dhanurdāsa below shows how he directed his desire for beauty towards Bhagavan, the most beautiful one, and became a saint in the course of time.**

Story: Goswami Tulsi Das (1532-1623 CE) turns his desire towards Rāma

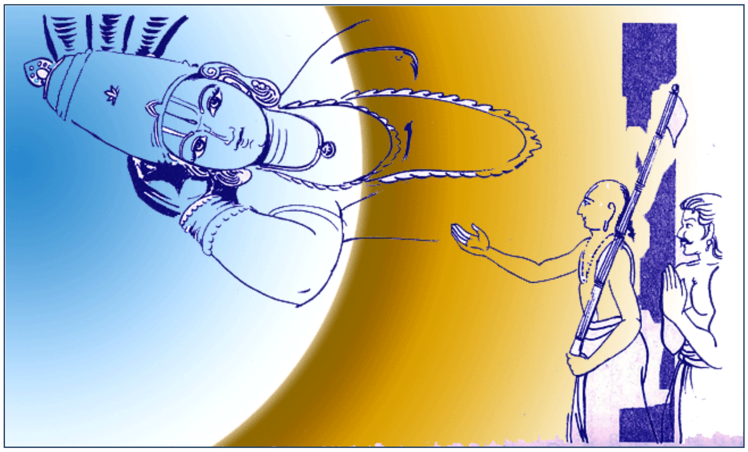
Tulsidas had married a lady named Ratnavali. The couple settled down in the Hindu sacred city of Varanasi. For the first time in his life, he found someone who really loved him. Therefore, Tulsidas too loved his wife a lot and took very good care of her. One day, Tulsidas went to a Mandir to worship Lord Hanuman and in the meantime, Ratnavali got a message to visit her father's home as soon as possible. When Tulsidas returned to his home, he found his wife missing. So, he decided to go to Ratnavali's father's home on the other side of the river. It was raining very heavily and there was a flood in the Ganga river, which flows through Varanasi. No boatman would take Tulsidas across the river because of the rain and floods. Tulsidas used a floating corpse on the river as a floater

and crossed the river to go to the other bank. When he reached the home of Ratnavali's father, he was in such a hurry that he did not want to take the stairs to her room upstairs. He saw a snake hanging from the window and thinking of it as a rope, he climbed up to her room.

When Ratnavali discovered the kind of risks her husband went through to meet her, she got very upset and said to him – "You are so much in love with me, and I am just a body made of bones and flesh. If you had loved Lord Rama even half as much as you love me, you would be a lot happier."[16]

These words of Ratnavali shocked Tulsidas. Soon, he abandoned his family life, and took to the worship of Lord Rama and became a Sadhu. He called his wife his Guru for having awakened him from his sleep so that he could see the Lord. Tulsidas then started worshipping Bhagavan Rama and Hanuman with great devotion.

He wrote many holy books like the Ramacharitmanas and stotras like the Hanuman Chalisa. Impressed by his devotion, Hanuman as well as Bhagavan Rama and Lakshman appeared in front of him. This was all the result of Tulsidas giving up his 'Moha' for the world, and for his wife.



Story: Dhanurdasa finds the Most Beautiful Eyes:

Shri Ramanujacharya once saw a strange incident – A man was walking backwards, while holding an umbrella over his girlfriend. The saint asked the man the reason for his inappropriate behavior. The man replied, "I worship beauty. Even while walking with this woman, I do not want to waste a single moment by not seeing the beauty of her lovely eyes."

Ramanuja thought, "I wish that his infatuation for beauty were directed towards Vishnu, the most beautiful one! If that happens, this man would attain great spiritual heights." Therefore, the saint said, "If you really worship beauty, then come today evening to the Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam at the time of the arati (prayer ceremony done with lamps)."

The man was reluctant to go to the temple but his lady-love said, "Perhaps a misfortune would befall you if you do not obey the command of a holy man. So just go for today." The man showed up at the required time in the temple, and he was overwhelmed when he saw the beauty of the lamps being waved around the Deity. He was moved by the beauty of the prayers being chanted by the devotees, and by the faith in their eyes.

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[16] *asthi charmamaya deha mum, taamey aisi preeti | taisi hon sri raam mein, hotii na tava bhava bheeti ||*

His transformation occurred there and then. He gave up his wrong ways and became a true devotee of Vishnu. His name is recorded as Dhanurdasa in the Hindu tradition. Dhanurdasa married his girlfriend with the blessings of Ramanujacharya and they both settled down in the temple city of Srirangam, where the couple spent their lives in the worship of Bhagavān.

Indeed, the realization that Bhagavān is the most beautiful one had made Dhanurdasa lose all arrogance and other negative traits of his character, as well as his love for worldly beauty, that was no match for the beauty of Bhagavān.

Story: Swami Dayanand (1824-1883 CE) demonstrates the claim of Hindu scriptures

> "One day Sardar Vikram Singh said to Swami Dayanand at Jullundhur, "I understand that the observance of Brahmacharya (celibacy) makes a man very powerful. Is it true?"
>
> Swamiji replied that the importance of Brahmacharya as described in the scriptures cannot be questioned.

> At this the Sardar remarked, "Swamiji, you too are a Brahmachārī. But you do not seem to possess extra-ordinary strength." Swamiji made no reply.
>
> At the end of the congregation when the Sardar got into his carriage, Swamiji went quietly and held fast one of the hind wheels of the carriage, which was drawn by two horses. The coachman whipped the horses several times, but the horses could not move. When the Sardar turned and looked back, Swamiji let go the carriage and said, "Sardarji, you must have got a concrete proof of the power of Brahmacharya." The Sardar looked at Swamiji in utter bewilderment and said nothing."[17]

[17] Page 82 in Pathak (1973)

14.Krodha (Anger): The Second Internal Enemy

14.1 What is Krodha?

Krodha means getting angry. Why do you get angry? When do you get angry? I get angry when someone teases me or hurts me. We get angry when I do not understand my homework. I get angry when I lose a game. I get angry when I do not like the rules that my parents ask me to follow.

Anger manifests itself in three stages:

1. Irritability
2. Anger in the mind, feeling of being insulted.
3. Hatred

14.2 Why should we avoid getting Angry?

1. When I get angry, I start yelling and screaming at others. My face turns red. If I look at myself in the mirror when I get angry, I will look horrible. **Therefore, by getting angry I make a fool of myself.**
2. When I get angry, I start doing wrong things. I forget my Dharma. My Dharma is to respect my parents, but I start shouting at them. I start abusing my parents. When I show krodha, I forget what is right and what is wrong. I just want to yell and scream and hit the other person. Once my krodha has gone away, I see all the bad things I had done. Then I feel very sad about what I had done because of my krodha. **Therefore, anger causes me to do inappropriate things.** See the story of King Pareekshit below.
3. When I do this, my parents get very hurt. When I scream at my friends, they think that I am mean. Sometimes when I get really very angry, I start fighting with my brother or sister or with my friend. In the fight, I can get hurt. Or I can hurt others. Then, I need a bandage and medicines. My friends then stop playing with me. I am no longer their friend. Due to my angry nature, everyone starts hating me as if I were an enemy. **Therefore, anger ruins my relationships with others.**

4. Krodha is also bad for my health. When I get angry, I start sweating. I can get a headache. My stomach can also start hurting. My heart starts pounding and I can even get a chest pain. I will have difficulty sleeping at night. **Therefore, anger hurts me more than the other person.**
5. Our Krodha hurts others and therefore it displeases Bhagavān, because He resides within everyone. **My anger annoys Bhagavān.** He refuses to accept any good work or any worship of a man who is angry.

Therefore, anger harms us in many ways. For our own benefit, we must learn to control our anger. For this reason, the Hindu scriptures say –

"Anger destroys fame, anger devours accumulated riches." **Matsya Purāṇa 157.3**

"Anger is a mortal enemy. It appears outwardly as a friend but is a dangerous enemy in truth. Anger is like a sharp sword that causes one's downfall in every way." **Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa** Whatever an angry person offers in a yajna or a homa or in other worship – all that perishes in no time, just as a non-baked pot of clay dissolves soon after water is poured into it. **Āpastamba Smriti 10.8**

Guru Shukracharya said – The Yajna, charity and austerity of an angry man are all futile. Only his yajna, charity and austerity bear great fruit who is free of anger. Children, servants, well-wishers, friends, wife, dharma and truth all go away from one who is angry by nature. Wise people must not behave like innocent boys and girls who create mutual enmities, because these naïve children cannot gage the weakness and strengths of their adversaries. **Mahābhārata 1.79.5-7**

Yudhishthira said – An angry man can commit an evil. Overcome with anger, he can murder his own Gurus. Under the influence of anger, he can insult even venerable individuals with his harsh words. **Mahābhārata 3.29.4**

Bheema said – The stress caused by anger burns even more than anger. Stressed with anger, I cannot sleep in the day or during the night. **Mahābhārata 3.35.11**

Sage Gautama said – He who suppresses his anger within him for a long time, and does not commit any angry act will never do something that causes him remorse later. **Mahābhārata 122.266.75**

Yudhishthira says – He who does not retaliate with anger towards someone else who is angry with him saves himself and well as others from frightful outcomes. He becomes like a physician who removes his as was others' flaws. **Mahābhārata 3.29.9**

Lord Dattatreya said to the Sādhyas – Do not abuse the person who abuses you. The withheld anger of the victim who bears the abuse is sufficient to burn the abuser and also takes his virtue from him. **Mahābhārata 5.36.5**

14.3 Medical Effects of Anger:

We can summarize the harmful effects of Anger on our body as follows:

1. Disturbs digestive processes leading to problems like constipation or diarrhea. The stomach lining also produces more acid, causing heart burn.
2. Increases blood pressure and raises heart rate.
3. Causes mental fatigue because nerves and mind become over-loaded.
4. Breathing becomes faster and shallow because the lungs are not able to inhale and exhale to their maximum capacity.
5. The adrenal gland secretes excessive adrenaline hormone. Chronic anger causes the glad to become hyperactive continuously and this makes our long-term behavior rash, irritable and hyper.
6. Due to improper breathing and blood circulation, different parts of the body get starved of oxygen resulting in symptoms like dark circles below eyes, blue lips etc.
7. Increased phlegm.
8. Difficulties of sleeping.
9. Increase in blood sugar content, hastening the onset of diabetes.

14.4 Practical Methods of Overcoming Anger

1. Take deep breaths. Sometimes, we get angry in a hurry because we have studied the situation carefully before blaming someone else quickly. Therefore, taking deep breaths gives us some extra time to think it over, and also relaxes our agitated mind and heart.
2. Think over the issue again to determine if you have become angry in haste. Try to study yourself and see if you are angry because you are tired or hungry, and not because the other person is at fault.
3. Start doing something different, or think something else. This will divert your mind and your anger will wear off after some time.
4. Drink a glass of cold water, or take a cold shower. Sometimes, we get angry because of the uncomfortable environment around us – too high humidity or temperature, thirst or hunger. These factors make us irritable. Therefore, try to make yourself more comfortable by quenching your thirst etc., and you will feel better.
5. Go to an empty room and sit alone for some time. Getting away from the scene that caused you anger can be beneficial. In solitude, you can just vent your anger at yourself, instead of directing it towards others.

6. Take some rest. Eat something.
7. If the anger is towards a person, then think of the times when he has done good things to you. Use these more pleasant memories to forgive that person.
8. When vicious and evil people make us angry, practice indifference ('upekshā') towards them. Just ignore them.

Abraham Lincoln suggested a very practical way of controlling one's anger. He said that whenever we get angry, we should write down in a letter why and on why we got angry. But we should not mail that letter. Instead, when

the mind gets calm, read that letter and reflect whether it was OK to have got angry, and whether the person to whom the anger was directed has any positive qualities. Reflect whether that person committed the mistake that made you angry out of any genuine reason. You will realize that in most cases, your anger was not justified, and would have been an impulsive act that you could have taken without looking at the situation from all angles.

Stories on Krodha

1.King Pareekshit's Anger leads to his death

Pareekshit was the Emperor of India. He was a very fair and just ruler. He made sure that there were no thieves and murderers in his kingdom. No one in his country went hungry. The rains came on time. He gave lots of donations to learned men and fed the poor. Everyone was happy in his kingdom and they thanked Bhagavan for making Pareekshit their king.

One day, on a hot summer day, Pareekshit went for hunting. After pursuing wild deer for several hours, he became very tired and searched for some water. Suddenly, he saw a small hut. He thought that the owner of the hut might have some water. When he entered the hut, he saw Rishi Shamika inside. The Rishi was meditating, with his eyes shut and his mind thinking of Bhagavan. Obviously, Shamika did notice the king arrive.

Pareekshit asked Rishi Shamika for some water. But the Rishi was lost deep in meditation and did not hear him. Pareekshit felt insulted and he became very angry. He said, "How dare you ignore your own King? I will teach you a lesson!" Pareekshit looked around and found a dead snake in the grass. He picked the snake with his bow, and put it around the neck of Shamika, who was still meditating. Some students of the Rishi who were playing outside the hut saw this. They were shocked. They rushed to Shringi, the son of Shamika, and told him everything. Meanwhile, Pareekshit left for his palace.

When Shringi arrived and saw the dead snake around his father's neck, he too became very angry. Now, Shringi was also a great Rishi. The words of a Rishi always come true.

Therefore, he now cursed Pareekshit, “Seven days from now, a flying snake will bite you to death.” After a few moments, Rishi Shamika came out of his meditation. When he heard what his son had done, he scolded him, “Shringi, what was the need to curse a great king like Pareekshit? He did not do anything that hurt me or harmed me. Rishis should learn to control their anger. What you did was very wrong.” Rishi Shringi now felt very guilty, but he could not take back the curse.

Meanwhile, Pareekshit felt very sorry about what he had done to Rishi Shamika. He thought, “I have always loved everyone. I have always respected Rishis and Pundits. Why did I do such a wicked deed today? May be I was irritated because I was thirsty. But even then, I should not have gotten angry at Rishi Shamika. I am sure he did not hear me because he in deep meditation. Now, what can I do to get punishment for my evil deed, which I did because I did not control my anger?”

Shamika sent a messenger to Pareekshit to inform him that his son had cursed the king to die after 7 days of a snake-bite. When Pareekshit heard of this, he sent his apologies to Sage Shamika. Then he thought, “I do deserve this punishment. It serves me right. I will now leave my palace and go to the banks of river Ganga. There, I will spend the remaining seven days of my life in worshipping Bhagavān Vishnu and will wait for my death.”

Pareekshit listened to stories of Vishnu for seven days. Then, a snake came a bit him, and he died. The story of Pareekshit shows how even good people can behave very badly when they get angry. Therefore, we should try to control our anger at every time.

2. THE BRAHMANA AND THE MONGOOSE: A Brahmana (a Pundit) once had a pet mongoose. A mongoose is a large rat that kills snakes. The Brahmana took good care of his mongoose, and treated it like a child. The Brahmana and his wife had a little baby boy. One day, when the baby was sleeping in a cradle, the mother had to go out to get grocery.

While she was out, a messenger came to their house from the palace of the king. He said that the king wanted to meet the Brahmana immediately. The Brahmana got worried. He did not want to leave his little baby boy alone. But then, he thought that he can leave the mongoose to guard the boy. So, he went with the messenger to the palace to see the king.

While both the Brahmana and his wife were out, a snake started crawling towards the cradle. The mongoose saw the snake. It thought that the snake might bite and kill the baby. So the mongoose attacked the snake and killed it. When the Brahmana returned home, the mongoose rushed to him. The Brahmana saw that there was blood on the mouth of the mongoose.

The Brahmana did not have patience. He thought that the mongoose had killed the baby boy. So he got very angry. The Brahmana picked a stick, and started beating the mongoose till it died. Then, he rushed inside to check on his baby boy. To his surprise, the Brahmana saw that the baby boy was completely fine. In fact, a dead snake lay below the cradle.

Now the Brahmana understood what had happened. When the mongoose saw the snake coming towards the cradle, it attacked the snake and killed it. The Brahmana now felt very sorry for what he had had done. He said, "If only I had patience and not got angry, I would have found out that my dear pet mongoose had not killed the snake." But it was too late now. The Brahmana had lost his pet forever.

3. STORY: LIVING AS IF IT WERE THE LAST DAY OR OUR LIFE

"One day a devotee came to Sant Tukaram and asked him: "Maharaj, you are so open and free in life; you have no secrets. You never become angry with anyone, you are so cool, collected, and so together. How has that happened to you? Please tell me the secret of your life?"
Instead of answering his question, Tukaram said, "Look, I know a secret about you."
The man did not know what to say. He asked, "Maharaj, what is that?"

Tukaram said, "You are going to die in seven days."

As Tukaram was a great saint, the man could not disbelieve his words. He went back home and did all that had to be done in those seven days. He became wonderful with his wife and children because he had only seven days more to live, and he tried to be the very best that he could be. On the seventh day someone told Tukaram that the man was now going to die.

Tukaram went to see the man and asked, 'Tell me what happened?"

The man said, "Maharaj, I am going to die now. Please bless me, pray for me."

Tukaram said, "All right, but how have you lived for the past seven days? Were you angry with your wife, children, or with your friends?"

The man replied, "Maharaj, how could I get angry with anyone if I were to die after seven days?"

Tukaram said, "Now you know my secret of keeping my mind cool, calm, and collected all the time. I remember that particular relationships can end at any moment!"

This was the secret of Tukaram's calm and peaceful mind. He knew that the next moment could be the last moment. He lived with an understanding and not with fear."[18]

14.5 Is all Anger Really Bad?

All anger is not bad and we cannot forgive everyone every time. Parents are angry when their children misbehave. It is the fear of this anger that motivates children to behave better in future. In the Ramayana, when Bhagavan Rama was ready to construct a bridge across the ocean from India to Lanka, he sat three days in prayer. He appealed to Varuna, the Deva of the Ocean, to show him the best path on which the bridge could be constructed with least effort. But Varuna behaved in an arrogant manner and refused to help Rama.

After three days therefore, Rama showed his anger, and threatened to dry up the entire ocean with a fiery arrow. Now, Varuna got scared and apologized to Rama, and showed him the best path to construct the bridge. Had Rama not shown his anger, Varuna would not have appeared to help at all.

[18] Swami Suddhananda, "Understanding Death," pages 4-10 in *The Sages Speak About Life & Death*. 1995. Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy (California)

Rama accepted his apology and forgave him. In fact, Rishi say that a person who is truly great might become angry, but as soon as the culprit apologizes, the great man quickly forgives and forgets the crime.

> "The anger of virtuous men is pacified easily but the wicked never give up their grievances. After all, gold can be melted, but who can melt mere grass?"
> **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 106**

15. Lobha (Greed): The Third Inner Enemy

“This world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for a single man’s greed.”
Mahatma Gandhi

Yudhishthira said – Anger is an enemy that is difficult to conquer whereas greed is an endless sickness. He alone is a saint who is engaged in doing the welfare of all living creatures. And he who has no compassion alone is evil man. **Mahābhārata 3.313.92**

15.1 What is Greed?

Our desires never really end. Once we have a Lexus, we’d want an expensive Mercedes car. Once we have the latter, we’d want a private helicopter. When our first desire gets fulfilled, we develop a second desire. And then a third one. One just keeps running after desires all the time. When these uncontrolled and excessive desires are for material objects (cars, video games, homes etc.), they are called ‘greed’. Sanskrit word for Greed is LOBHA. Greed is the condition of the mind in which one is not satisfied even after gaining what one wants. Absence of contentment even after having gained the object of desire means the individual is greedy. Unfortunately greed in human beings is not based upon how much one has.

Most animals are programmed to take what is necessary. Occasionally some may store for the next meal or for the winter. Human beings hoard far more than they really need. One with 10 dollars wants 100; one with 100 wants 1000 and so forth!

Greed expresses as wanting more of one already has; it may express as having difficulty in parting what we have or as wanting what others have. Greed is born out of an inner sense of deprivation and insecurity which can be frequently traced to the childhood.

- Emotional deprivation: Real or perceived
- Deprivation of food, clothing or toys: Real or perceived
- Erroneous conclusions that one's needs are not met.
- One may fear losing what one has: Material objects/wealth/Power/Relationships

15.2 What are the Harms of Greed?

1. We forget the difference between our ‘needs’ and ‘wants’: It is wrong to be greedy. Sometimes, we all become a little greedy. We need only 1 or 2 toys to play with at one time. So we should not be greedy and ask our parents to buy us new toys every week. When we go to a restaurant, we can eat only one ice cream. But because of our lobha (greediness), we start fighting with our parents to buy us an ice-cream and also a candy. Now do we really need a new toy every week? Do we really need

2. We spoil our friendships and family relationships: No one likes a greedy child. He makes no friends, because he does not want to share his toys or games with anyone. A greedy child sometimes even steals things from others. He snatches things with which others are playing. When he becomes older, his greedy behavior becomes worse. He starts taking other people's money unfairly. Because of our greed, others can become sad and poor. Therefore, we should give up the habit of lobha. Instead, we should share (daanam) our extra things with others.

Story: How a Greedy Miser became a great Saint

This is a story of Puranadara Dasa (1484-1564), who is traditionally considered the founder of Carnatic (S. Indian) music. Puranadara was born to a very kind trader and jeweler Varadappa Naik and his wife after the couple prayed to Lord Venkateshvara for a child. Varadappa was very wealthy, but he was also very kind towards the poor and needy. In his old age, he handed over his shop of gems and pawning to his son Sreenivasa and married him to a very pious wife Saraswati. Sreenivasa completely changed the nature of the business. He was a very business minded and a hard heated person. He cared only about maximizing his profits, and did not give anything from his income in charity to the poor and the needy. He stuck very hard bargains with poor and had no pity over their condition. As a result of his miserliness and his business acumen, the family business greatly prospered. Sarasvati, on the other hand, was a very kind hearted woman who liked to help the poor. But Sreenivasa forbade her to give anything in charity to anyone. Varadappa tried to make his son see the virtues of sharing and caring, but without success.

One day, Varadappa fell very sick. The physician suggested giving Varadappa the ash of some burned precious gems. But the miser son Sreenivasa simply rejected the idea of spending a lot of money to procure the gems. Saraswati tried to reason with her husband that his father's life was more precious than any gem, but he merely said – "Father is very old and will die one day anyway. Why waste money on the gems for getting the medicinal ash?"

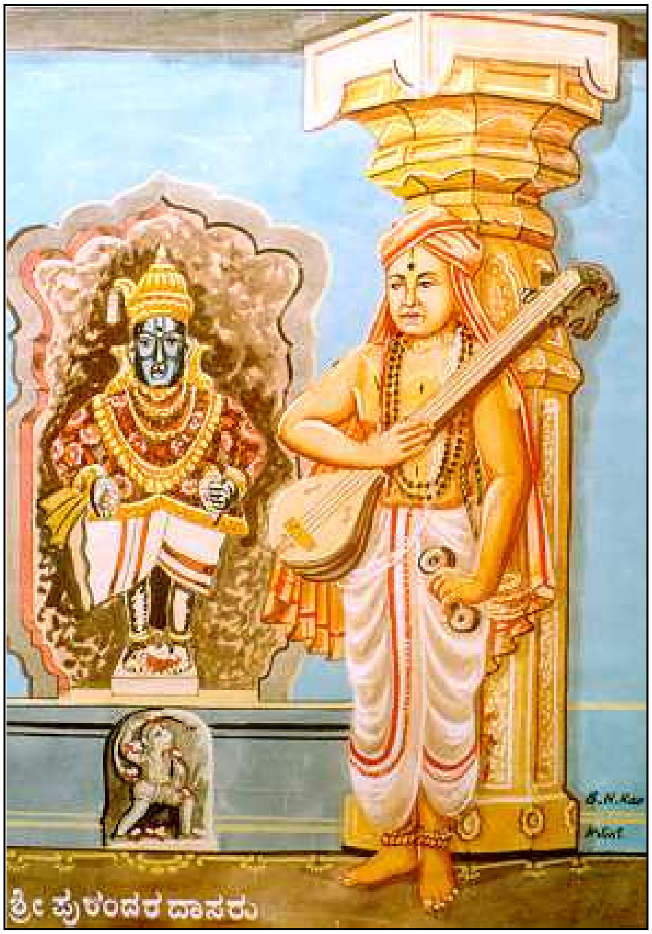
Varadappa soon died. Sreenivasa continued his old ways of being a merciless pawn shop and amassed so much wealth that people gave him the nickname 'navakoti' or "the owner of 90 million."

One day, a poor Brahmana came to beg some money at Sreenivasa's shop for performing the thread ceremony of his son. Sreenivasa was by now a notorious miser. So he was surprised that some had actually come to ask him for money! Instead of declining any help, he merely told the Brahmana to come the following day. When the Brahmana came the next day, Sreenivasa asked him to come later. This kept repeating day after day, but the miser Sreenivasa would just not relent.

One day, while cleaning his shop, Sreenivasa found a box of fake and worthless coins. When the Brahmana came the next time, he gave that box of coins to him say – "This should be enough money for you to perform the thread ceremony."

The Brahmana of course found out that the coins were fake and worthless. He decided to be elsewhere and coincidentally, landed up at Sreenivasa's home. Sreenivasa was away in his shop, and the Brahmana said to Saraswati (not knowing that she was his wife or that it was his home) – "I went for six months day after day to this miser and heartless merchant begging for a small amount of money which I needed to perform my son's thread ceremony. Finally, the cheat gave me a box of fake coins which were worthless. Could you help me?"

Saraswati of course realized who the poor Brahmana was referring too. She felt really ashamed at her husband's niggardliness. But she had been forbidden by Sreenivasa to give anything in charity. Suddenly, she realized that



the diamond nose-ring that she wore was gifted by her own mother. Therefore, it was not the property of husband and she could gift it to the Brahmana.

The Brahmana thanked the gracious lady with tears in his eyes. Then, he went to Sreenivasa's hop and asked him to pawn it and give him some money instead for his son's ceremony. When Sreenivasa saw the expensive nose-ring, he was perplexed because it was identical to what his wife wore. So he told the Brahmana to come the following day, giving the excuse that he needed a day to evaluate its price before he could pawn it and give money in return. He locked the nose-ring in his shop and went home for dinner.

At home, he asked his wife to produce her nose-ring. Saraswati was terrified. She was already disgusted with her husband's miserly behavior. Now she was worried that he might scold her for gifting away her expensive gold ring. Under the pretext of getting it from the bed-room, Saraswati went to the kitchen. She decided to commit suicide by grinding the diamonds of her bracelet and eating them with water. So she ground diamonds in a pestle-mortar and was mixed them with water in a glass. Just as she was about to drink the poison, she heard something fall from the ceiling into the glass. It was the nose-ring! She was overjoyed and bowed to the mūrti of Lord Vishnu for the miracle.

But when she took the nose-ring to Sreenivasa, it was his turn to get shocked. He thought that someone must have stolen it from the shop. He rushed to the shop and found that the nose-ring was missing from the safe. He returned home and asked Saraswati to tell the truth. She told him how she had gifted the ornament to a poor Brahmana who had been cheated with fake coins, and how she was about to commit suicide for the fear of her husband when a miracle saved her.

That night, Sreenivasa could not sleep. He concluded that it could have been only Lord Vishnu who had appeared as the Brahmana. The following morning, he said to his wife – "Saraswati, you have opened my eyes. I had been blinded by the love of wealth. This greed made me kill my own father. I also ill-treated Bhagawan Vishnu who came to my hut in the guise of a Brahmana. And then due to the same greed, I was going to lose you – my wonderful wife. What a sinner I am, whereas how blessed my wife is. She conducted herself so much more graciously and honorably than I!"

From that day, Sreenivasa, who was 30 years of age then, had a change of heart. He decided to donate all his wealth to the poor and the needy. His wife was overjoyed. Together, the couple and their children decided to roam from one pilgrim center to another inside the Vijayanagara Empire in S India, singing the praises of God. Ten years later, during his travel, Sreenivasa met Saint Vyasatīrtha, a scholar who followed the philosophy of Saint Madhvacharya (13th cent. CE). Vyasatīrtha initiated Sreenivasa to Samnyāsa, giving him the name 'Purandara Dāsa'.

Purandara Dasa composed thousands of soul-stirring and melodious songs in praise of Lord Vishnu and his various forms. Almost 1000 of these survive today. He systematized the method of teaching Carnatic music which is followed to this day. One of his disciples, Swami Haridasa, became a famous Hindustani classical musician, and was the guru of Tansen, the legendary musician of north India. So, Purandara Dasa influenced the musical tradition of the entire Indian subcontinent. His very first musical composition starts with the words of lament for having wasted his earlier years in material indulgences.

Sreenivasa Naik realized that true happiness can never result from pursuing wealth as the ultimate goal in our life. Doing this makes us so greedy and heartless that we lose all love and respect for even our near and dear ones. True happiness results only when we pursue God as our final goal in our life. This realization made the heartless miser a saint, and gave him the eternal peace that he was searching for.

3. We do wrong things: Greed makes us do inappropriate things. Very often, we read about people shop-lifting things from a store. What is interesting is that sometimes, the thief is not a poor person! Rather, he is a rich man who just could not resist the temptation of possessing an expensive shirt. He certainly had the money to buy it, but it exceeded his monthly budget. Not being able to overcome his greed, he decided to steal it, and got caught! We also read about people who are in reality millionaires but they are so greedy that they do not hesitate to cheat their customers to make an extra buck.

The Bhagavad Gita says:

Desire, Anger and Greed are the three gates to Hell. **Gita 16.21**

The story based on the Mahābhārata below illustrates how greed made Bheeshma turn a blind eye towards the evil actions of King Duryodhana:

STORY ON GREED – THE LAUGHTER OF DRAUPADI

When the Mahabharata war was over, the victorious Pandavas approached Bheeshma, who was lying on a bed of arrows, to give them advise on politics, spirituality, Dharma and so on. While they were listening to his instructive words, a thought suddenly crossed Draupadi's mind and she started laughing loudly.

Everyone got distracted and thought that it was quite rude of Draupadi to start laughing loudly when they were all listening to serious advice on Dharma from Bheeshma, who was himself such a respected and elderly person.

But Bheeshma understood that Draupadi must have an important reason to laugh, and asked her to explain to everyone the cause of her laughter. Draupadi then said to Bheeshma – "I laughed because I thought it was really funny that you should teach Dharma to Pandavas, who are very virtuous and dutiful themselves. You never taught Dharma to evil Duryodhana when he tried to kill the Pandavas. You

never tried to teach Dharma to Duryodhana when he cheated in the game of dice and snatched our kingdom, forcing us to live in the forest. When the Kauravas tried to disrobe me in front of everyone, you never tried to stop them by teaching them about Dharma. It is therefore hypocritical now that you should teach the meaning of Dharma and Moksha to my husbands."

The Pandavas were aghast that their wife should be so impertinent so as to question the character of their great grandfather, who was so well respected by everyone. But Bheeshma intervened and asked the Pandavas not to get angry. He said – "Draupadi has indeed raised the correct doubts about my wrong behavior. And the answer to her question will be especially relevant in the Kaliyuga, when Dharma will decline and Adharma will become stronger. Draupadi is correct in alleging that I did not stop Duryodhana from doing evil when I indeed should have. This is because I was working for him, he was my King, and I was dependent on him for my livelihood. Therefore, I could never gather the courage to stop him from treading the path of Adharma. But when Arjuna's arrows hit me and drained my blood, bringing me to close to inevitable death, all the food and luxuries that I had enjoyed under Duryodhana have now become irrelevant and I have realized my folly. Therefore, now I shall only instruct about Dharma so that people should learn from my example, and never side with Adharma for the sake of protecting their livelihood."

The story teaches us that when we earn our salary by serving dishonest and evil people, or by working for businesses that have unfair, discriminatory practices or which produce substandard products, we might be forced to compromise our own honesty and fairness from time to time. This is because while serving such people or employers, we cannot criticize their wrong practices fearlessly for the danger of losing our own jobs and livelihood. Life offers choices, and as far as possible, we should try to disassociate ourselves from dependence on evil people so that we can practice Dharma more easily. This might involve some sacrifices (such as getting a lower salary); but that is still better than eventually coming to complete ruin because of supporting people who follow Adharma.

<u>Discussion:</u> List 3 employers for which you should not work even if you do not commit evil actions yourself –

1.

2.

3.

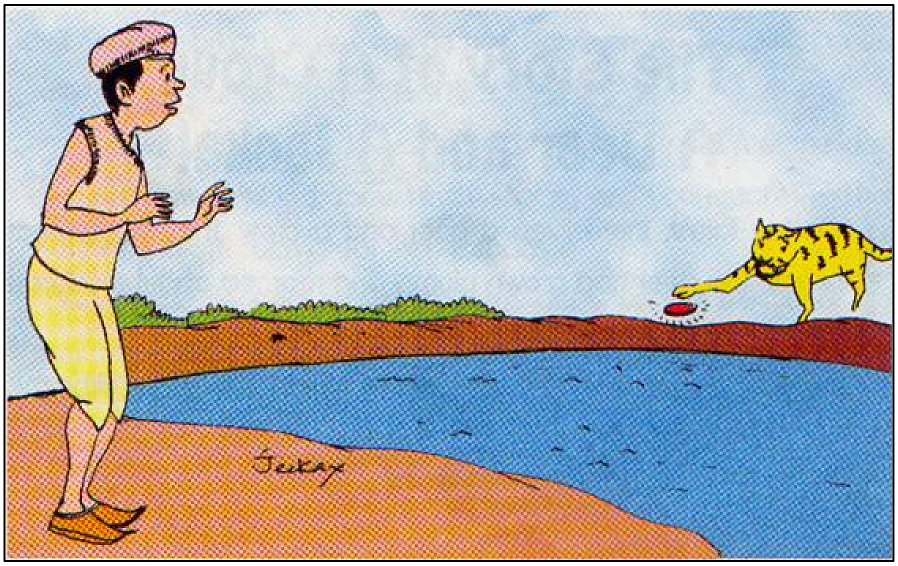
4. We land up harming ourselves: The story below shows how lobha can harm us and even kill us.

STORY: THE GREEDY TRAVELER: There lived a tiger in a jungle. He fed himself by hunting. But when the tiger grew old, he could not run and catch deer. He had to go hungry many days. So he thought of a plan. He had once eaten a lady wearing a golden bangle. So the tiger took that bangle in his paw. Whenever any human being passed by, the tiger would say aloud, “Here is a free gold bangle for anyone who wants to take it.” Most people were just too scared of the tiger and did not go close to him

One day, a very greedy traveler was walking by when he saw the tiger with the bangle. The tiger again shouted, “Here is a free gold bangle for anyone who wants to take it.” The man shouted back. “I want the gold bangle. But how can I trust you? If I come close to you, you will kill me and eat me up.”

But the tiger replied, “I have killed many animals and human beings in the past. But now I am sorry for what I did. Therefore, I am giving this bangle free. If you come and take it, I will feel less sorry for killing other animals. Please come and take it as a gift.”

The traveler was so greedy that he did not use his brains. How can a tiger become so nice suddenly? The tiger must kill and eat other animals or human beings to live. But because the traveler was greedy, he went close to the tiger to get that gold bangle.



And suddenly, the tiger jumped at him and killed him. Then the tiger ate him up!

This story teaches us a very good message. Sometimes, wicked people offer us candy, toys and other gifts. If we are greedy, we will go close to them to get these gifts. The wicked people can then grab us, kidnap us, throw us into their car

and take us away from our parents. Therefore, we should never have lobha in our mind.

The fact is that greed does not take us to any good condition or to a good place. We harm ourselves with our greed. Therefore, Rishi Parāshara says in the Mahābhārata:

> Sage Parashara said – "The wise man should not abandon the rules of Dharma to earn wealth by questionable means because wealth obtained in this manner is not said to lead to one's welfare." **Mahābhārata 12.294.25**

15.3 Conquering our Greed:

15.3.1 Distinguish between 'Need' and 'Want'

We can conquer greed in the same ways by which we can overcome our desires. But a very practical way to overpower greed is to learn how to distinguish between our needs and wants. We want a lot of things in our life every day, but do we really need all those things?

Thing of this example – Sometimes, we go to a Mall, and just buy a lot of things like there is no tomorrow. We carry home bags and bags of clothes, shoes, electronics etc. But after a day or two, we realize that we did not really need more than half of those things. So we make another trip to the Mall to return these things that we did not really want!

How could we have prevented this useless trip and this immature behavior? One way is to make a list what you really want before going to the Mall. While making the list, think why you need that thing and will you be fine even if you did not have that thing. Put that item down on the list only if you conclude after some logical thinking that you really need it, and you will suffer if you do not buy it. This simple habit of getting only things that are on a list created beforehand will curb the bad habit of buying on impulse due to greed.

Our Rishis have narrated the following story of a man who did not differentiate his needs, and his greedy wants. Finally, Bhagavān Vishnu made him realize that his greed was only landing him into trouble, and that what he really needed was very different from what he wanted.

Story: The Greatest Boon of Bhagavān vishnu:

A householder was in the habit of asking newer and newer things from Bhagawan Vishnu in his prayers every day. Finally fed up, Vishnu appeared in front of the man and said, "Look, for one last time, I will grant you three wishes. Just three. Think and ask me those three wishes. I will not grant you any more wishes again. You can ask them in as much time as you like."

The householder was happy but also nervous. He could ask for any 3 things. But what should those three things be. However, he had no difficulty asking for the first one! He immediately asked, "Lord, I am sick and tired of my wife. I want you to take her soul so that she is dead." Vishnu granted that wish and said, "When you want the other two wishes to be granted, remember me and I will be back."

The householder was performing the funeral of his late wife. He was smiling within. But all the mourners were weeping. His children were inconsolable. They all narrated what a good lady she had been. She dutifully did all the household tasks, was a diligent mother and was very respectful and loving towards everyone. The man realized that perhaps, he had not realized her real worth. He felt very guilty as to what he had done. So he thought of Bhagawan Vishnu and asked for his second wish to come true, "May my wife come back to me." A miracle happened, and his wife was alive. Everyone was overjoyed!

Later, when he was with his close confidants and friends, he revealed how Bhagavan Vishnu had granted him a few wishes. But, he lamented that he had only one wish left and did not know how he should use it! "Perhaps, I should ask for immortality," he said to them. "Of what use is immortality if you keep sick? So ask for good health," one of his friends said.

The second friend said, "Of what use is a long life or good health if your friends die before you? So ask that your friends are with you forever." The third friend said, "May be, you should ask for a lot of wealth. Because, sometimes even friends can desert you if you are not wealthy."

The householder got many more opinions and was even more confused than ever. That night, he could not sleep. He went out for a walk and prayed to Bhagavan Vishnu and said, "Only you know how I should use my last wish. Please suggest the best thing that I could ask for."

Lord Vishnu appeared before him and said smilingly, "My son, learn to be content what you get from your hard work. Do not keep yearning for what you do not get from your efforts. I will give you the gift of contentment with the results of your labor, because that is the most precious treasure that you can have."

The householder learned his lesson. He bowed to God in reverence and saw Him for one last time before He disappeared.

15.3.2 Practice the Virtues of Non-Hoarding and Contentment

Our Rishis have said –

> Sage Shaunaka said – The thirst for riches never ends. Therefore, contentment alone is real happiness. For this reason, the wise perceive contentment as the best (wealth). **Mahābhārata 3.2.46**

Later, we will learn more about these virtues, which are fit antidotes for Greed.

Class Discussion: Give examples to discuss the statement – "No number of laws to punish swindling, cheating, or stealing can work if people are greedy."

16. Moha (Delusion): The Fourth Internal Enemy

16.1 What is Moha?

Moha means 'Delusion', or not seeing things just as they are, but imagining them to be different from what their nature is. All of us suffer from some delusion or another. Sometimes we think of a person who wants to harm us as our friend. Some people take drugs, or smoke thinking that it gives them happiness. But these bad habits give them even more sorrow in the long run.

16.2 Causes of Moha, and the Means to overcome them:

1. **Avidya (Wrong Understanding) and Abhinivesha (Love of Life):** In the Yaksha Prashna episode in the Mahābhārata, Yaksha asked Yudhishthira, "What is the greatest wonder in this world?" Yudhishthira answered, "Everyday, we see people die. And yet, every person lives his life as if he will not die." What Yudhishthira meant is that we spend all our life pursuing and chasing trivial things even though we do not bring anything with us and will not take anything with us when we die. Death is inevitable for our body, but the soul is immortal. But even then, we spend all our lives in pursuit of goals that serve only our body, and not our goal! The first cause of delusion is that we fail to distinguish between what is temporary (the body and all the material objects) and what is permanent (Atma and Bhagavan) as a result of which we spend most of our time pursuing temporary things instead of permanent ones. We all love life and fear death, forgetting that death affects only our body, which is meant to be a temporary garment of the real 'I', which is our Atma. Due to this fear of death, we live perpetually in a state of denial, and do not want to think about or plan for the journey of our soul after our physical death. Or, we go to unbelievable extent to preserve and save our perishable body, even at the cost of our spiritual progress. This cause of delusion is overcome by Vidya (knowing the distinction between the temporary and the permanent) and by reducing our attachment towards our body.
2. **Mamatva** (Attachment): In the Bhagavad Gita, King Dhritarashtra asks Sanjaya in the very first verse, "Gathered on the holy plain of Kurukshetra to fight each other, what did **my** sons and **those of Pandu** then do?" The important point to note in this verse is that although Dhritarashtra had himself raised both his biological children, as well as those of his dead brother Pandu, he treated only his biological children as 'mine', and those of Pandu as 'others'. Even though the eldest son of Pandu was entitled to get the throne after Dhritarashtra, his mental distinction between 'mine' and 'others' made him ignore the atrocities of his own son Duryodhana against the Pandavas. After the war was over, and the Pandavas were victorious, Yudhishthira, the eldest son of Pandu, became the king. Now he was in the shoes of Dhritarashtra. When Krishna decide to return to Dwaraka, he chose to say very aptly these words to Yudhishthira, "*Mama (mine) – these two syllables are the gateway to death. And 'na mama' (not mine), these three syllables lead to the eternal Brahman (Ashvamedhika Parva*

13.3)." Krishna was hinting to Yudhishthira that he should not get repeat the mistakes of Dhritarashtra, who got deluded into thinking that only the Kauravas are his sons, and the Pandavas are not. In fact, the second cause of our delusion is our erroneous thinking that something or some person 'belong to us.' In reality, nothing belongs to us, and no one owns us. We do not even own our body, because most of the day, we are using it to serve the needs of our employer, government and our family! To overcome this false notion of 'me' and 'mine', we should reflect on the fact that everything actually belongs to Bhagavan, and we are merely temporary caretakers.

3. **Rāga and Dvesha**: The third great cause of delusion is the pair of rāga and dvesha – or likes and dislikes. When we like something or some person dearly, we tend to magnify their virtues (or imagine virtues in them that they do not possess) and also dismiss or ignore their flaws. For example, a boy who is infatuated with his girlfriend will ignore the fact that she is has a violent temper. Or he may think her to be the most beautiful woman in the world, when she is not, by the criteria of others. Conversely, if a man hates his coworker (because the coworker got the promotion that the man deserved), he will start thinking that his coworker was undeserving and has no good qualities that merited him the promotion. Dislikes not based on objective facts leads to evils like racism and stereotyping. On the other hand, liking someone for subjective reasons (or for no rational reason) can lead to favoritism and nepotism. The person who indulges in racism, favoritism etc., starts believing that his emotions are very logical and rational even though they are just based on his subjective personal likes and dislikes, not on facts or on the true nature of people or things. Such a person then becomes deluded. To overcome Raga and Dvesha, we should learn to control our senses (including the mind) and make a conscious attempt to have the same attitude towards the pairs of opposites like pain and pleasure; praise and criticism; friend and enemy etc.

The word 'moha' or its related words 'mohita' are also used to denote someone who is in a trance, or under a spell or in a state of hypnotism. Such a person cannot react normally to the environment around him in a normal, reasonable manner. In fact, even those of us who are in 'our senses' ignore the true nature of things, the non-permanency of the body, the permanency of the soul, the myth that we can possess something eternally etc., and act every day in a manner that is irrational from the true spiritual standpoint. It is as if we are under the spell of attachments, dislikes, ignorance and so on.

Stories explaining Moha (Delusion)

Story: Do we even own our own Body?

"This dilemma of ownership was the theme of a drama in Sanskrit. In this drama, a legal dispute arises among the claimants to a human body. The defendant says, "This is my body; I am its legitimate owner." His mother claims that the body is an extension of her, as she carried it for nine months and it was born of her. His father claims to be the body's material cause, and further claims that he provided for its upkeep until it matured. His wife says, 'This man is only my other half and cannot make any decision or claim without my consent." His son and daughter say that they have a claim of support from the body, at least until they become adults and can take care of themselves. His employer argues that he owns the

body, at least from 8AM to 5PM every day. The state proves that it has the right to conscript the body whenever the country is in need. The elements claim the body, as do the plants and animals that provided its nourishment. Mother Earth says, “This body is eventually going to become one with me, therefore, I am its true owner.”

Amidst the reasoning of so many claimants, the defendant’s evidence proves inadequate, and the judge finds it impossible to establish any one as the sole owner of the body. He finally comes up with a solution. He puts the body in a trust and asks whether any of the claimants will take the responsibility to manage it. Since no one else volunteers, he appoints the one who inhabits the body as its sole trustee. The attitude of the trustee is different from that of owner, as it implies an understanding that one is born into an interdependent world with responsibility to manage the resources that have been entrusted to one, for the benefit of all.”[19]

This story is a great illustration of the following words of Rishi Asita Devala:

> Asita Devala said to Narada: In reality, this soul does not belong to anyone, nor does anything belong to the soul. The soul is every alone, but it starts considering the body in which it dwells as its own, and therefore experiences happiness and sorrows. **Mahābhārata 12.275.36**
>
> Asita Devala said to Narada: Neither this body is mine, nor anything in this entire world belongs to me. Just like it is mine, so also it belongs to others – the person who has this understanding never gets entangled with delusion. **Mahābhārata 12.174.15**

Story: Futility of Worldly Possessions

Once when Guru Nanak was passing through the city of Lahore (now in Pakistan), a rich Hindu trader named Dhunichand invited the saint for a meal in his palatial mansion. Dhunichand was very proud of his wealth. Even while the Guru ate his meal, Dhunichand kept describing to him how rich he was, how much wealth he possessed and so on.

After Guru Nanak had finished his meal, he gave a sewing needle to Dhunichand and said, “Please keep this needle safely and take it to heaven after your death. When we meet there, I’d like to get it back from you.”

Dhunichand looked confused and he said, “But how can anyone take anything with us after we die? “ Guru Nanak smiled and said, “Exactly, you cannot carry even a small needle with you after you die. Then do you think you can carry all your wealth with you upon your death? If not, then what are you so proud of?”

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[19] Page 57, Purnavidya Vedic Heritage Teaching Program, Vol VI (Values), published by Arshavidya Gurukulam

Dhunichand understood the message that one must not be proud of what we wear, what we eat, where we live. All our worldly possessions are left behind when we die. Dhunichand now became a changed man, and he devoted his wealth for constructing Dharamshalas (community places for worship, satsang, wedding etc.) with his wealth.

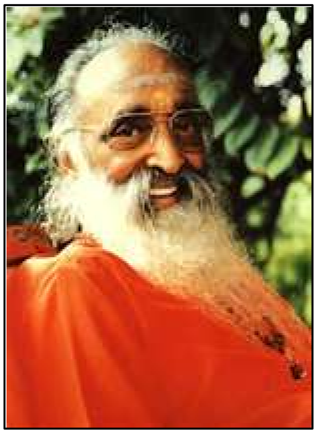
This story is a great illustration of the following words of Emperor Bali:

> Bali said to Indra: You are overcome with the delusion "It is mine', and want that kingdom which is really not mine, not yours or anyone else's. In reality, the kingdom never stays with anyone permanently. **Mahābhārata 12.227.45**

Story: A Deluded Person is like a Drunk Man

"Some drunken men got into a boat one moonlit night and started rowing. They rowed the entire night. Early in the morning, now sober, they found that they had not moved an inch. What was wrong they asked? They had forgotten to raise the anchor. Just as the anchored boat could not move, the mind that is attached to worldly things cannot move into the deeper depth of itself."[20]

Story: The Delusion of a Materialistic Person:



One day, a man came to Swami Chinmayananda and prostrated in front of him to offer his respects. Swamiji immediately got up and prostrated at the man's feet.

The man was aghast. "What are you doing Swamiji? Please get up."

Swami Chinmayananda asked, "If you do not like me bowing to you, then why did you prostrate in front of me?"

The man replied, "I prostrated in front of you because you are a Sannyasi ('a renouncer'), who has renounced the world for the sake of God."

Swamiji replied, "I bowed before you because you are even a greater Sannyasi, as you have renounced God for the sake of the world!"[21]

Story: We are responsible for our own Delusion

Many people give the excuse that this world has captivated them, and it is not they who are clinging to material pleasures. To explain the fallacy of this excuse, a parable is narrated[22] –

> A seeker went to a Sannyasin and asked him, "Swamiji, this world has ensnared me in many different ways. Please tell me a way to get out of its captivity." The Swami did not respond to him.

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[20] Page 78 in "Vedanta: Swami Chinmayananda – His Words, His Legacy," Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy, California (2011).
[21] Swami Tejomayananda. 2001. *Vision of the Bhagavad Gita*. Central Chinmaya Mission
[22] Swami Akhandananda Sarasvati (1963), p. 225

After some time, the two went for a walk. Suddenly, the Swami encircled the trunk of a tree with his arms and started shouting, “Hurry! Save me! This tree has imprisoned me. Please free me!”

The seeker was perplexed and remarked, “How can that be, Swamiji? This tree has no hands to capture you, it cannot move, it cannot exercise its will on you. So how can it imprison you?”

The Swami smiled and replied, “This world too does not have hands. The natural elements have no life in them, they have no free will. It is you who has life and a free will. Then how can the world imprison you? It is you who do not let it go from your hands!”

Story: The Moha of Princess Zebunissa is Shattered

Zebunissa

Prince Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Emperor Shah Jehan (1628-1656 CE) was a serious student of the Upanishads and had 50 of them translated from Sanskrit to Persian. His sister Zebunissa studied the Persian translation and became deeply influenced by their teachings. Prince Aurangzeb had given an imported mirror from China as a gift to Zebunissa. In those days, mirrors were prized possessions. Zebunissa was very attached to her mirror.

One day after she had taken a bath, she asked a maid to fetch the mirror for her. The maid went inside the Princess’ chamber and accidentally dropped the mirror, shattering it to pieces. She stood right there as she did not have the courage to go out and convey the news of her carelessness to the Princess. Zebunnisa waited for some time and then sent in another maid to find out why the first maid had not returned with the mirror. The second maid came out, trembling, and conveyed the bad news to the Princess.

But Zebunnisa merely sighed and smiled, and then said, “I am glad that my object of attachment, the Chinese mirror, got shattered to pieces, and shattered my useless attachment along with it!”

17. Mada (Excessive Pride): The Fifth Internal Enemy

17.1 What is ‘Mada’?

The Sanskrit word of excessive pride is Mada. It means excessive vanity about one's accomplishments, including education, finances, family heritage or social status. It is one of the six formidable enemies of the mind which are not easy to conquer. Shankaracharya defines this word in the following way - "*vidyaadinimittaatsvasmin aadhikyabuddhih*” meaning "The mental attitude born in the form of 'I am a great person. I am healthy, rich and a great soul and who is equal to me on this earth,' is spoken of as Mada or Pride by the learned ones."

Such attitude of arrogance with regards to one's accomplishments tends to be self-perpetuating. It is perfectly reasonable to set the goals and working hard to reach them and then finally patting oneself on the back for the efforts and the results achieved.

Arrogance tends to be self-perpetuating. It gives an immediate sense of gratification, as one feels important for the moment. It also feeds upon itself and grows. For those who live in this self-created exaggerated opinion of themselves, the realities of life situations eventually cause them to be taken by surprise and to suffer great disappointments. Pride is akin to a balloon that keeps growing until it eventually bursts.

Some people are very status conscious. They think that just because they are rich or good looking or intelligent or powerful, others should bow before them. They are so full of themselves that even though they do not respect others or treat others with dignity, they expect and demand that others should treat them specially. But virtuous people do not ask for special privileges for themselves. Instead, they always treat everyone with dignity, and always do their bit. They do not think that just they owe anything to others. They do not think it is their duty to serve others or help out others. They feel that they are a blessing to the human society and that others are fortunate to have them in their midst! They are ‘intoxicated’ with their wealth, power, glory, looks etc. These people eventually come to ruin.

17.2 Different Grades of ‘Mada’ or Bad Pride:

The Sanskrit language has several terms to describe the different grades and types of pride. Note however that these words are used interchangeably in Sanskrit to a great extent, just as they are in English.

- **Abhimāna or Mānitva: Conceit, Egomania.** The characteristics of a person whose mind is over-powered with this type of pride is described as follows - “Mānitva means demanding respect from others for the qualities one has. In a human being the need to be recognized is natural. However, when this need is accompanied by feelings of insecurity about oneself, then

one seeks acceptance from others. When one demands respect from others, one puts oneself in their hands. Not getting respect makes one insecure, angry, and at times, more demanding. In receiving respect from others, one can never be sure whether it is given spontaneously or because it is demanded. If one occupies a position of authority, one may receive respect from people by virtue of being in that particular position, but once the position is gone the respect also goes away with it. When one is able to accept oneself, one has discovered respect for oneself. One then has no need to demand respect from others."[23]

- **Ahamkāra: Egotism, Egocentrism, Selfish behavior.** A person depicting this mental flaw only thinks about himself, and not about others. He looks at everything from only his own perspective and starts judging others. For example, a person from the United States showing this behavior does not try to understand how and why people in the Middle East believe in and do certain things before he starts commenting, "Why do the people in Middle East wear a tent and walk around with a towel on their heads?" Only if the person had some understanding of the climate in that region, he would not make this silly remark. Rishis and Sants say that the greatest harm of Ahamkāra is that it takes us away from Bhagavān because we even refuse to acknowledge His gifts to us every day. We only look at things from our perspective and say, "I am rich because I worked hard. What has God got to do with it?" As long as we have this flaw in our character, we can never surrender our mind, heart and soul to Him, and therefore we can never be one with Him.
- **Darpa:** Pride with arrogance and intolerance. A person who suffers from 'Darpa' is sharp-tongued and rude to others. He has no patience with what he perceives as the flaws in others ("I do not suffer fools gladly") even though he might actually have several flaws in himself.
- **Mada:** Total Intoxication with one's power, wealth, glory, influence etc. This type of a person is so full of himself that he has absolutely no concern for how others feel due to his behavior. Even when this person does something good to others, it is merely a tool to satisfy his own ego.

17.3 The Types of Good Pride

All pride is not bad. A true Sadhu does not even have these two types of pride. But most of us are not Sadhus. The common person must have the following two types of pride, otherwise we are not even fit to be called human being.

- **Constructive Pride:** Pride is not always bad, and constructive pride is good. The latter helps us to overcome our weaknesses so that we can excel in our work. Constructive pride in the overall performance of our sports or academic team, for example, instills in us a sense of belongingness to the group and motivates us to put in our best in the team effort for the victory of the entire team. When we take pride in our work, we try to improve our skills further, and put in greater effort so that the task can be completed perfectly. Pride in our country can inspire us to practice and uphold our glorious national heritage and traditions. But excessive pride can be destructive, especially when we try to make others look bad or make then look small in comparison to us.

[23] Page 91 in Purnavidya, vol 6

This type of pride leads to arrogance, boastfulness and conceit. For example, it is OK to be proud of our country, but this pride should not lead us to insult people from other countries. It is acceptable to be proud of our cultural heritage and our religion, but we should not tease others by saying that theirs is inferior.

- **Self-Respect:** Secondly, pride does not mean that we should have no self-respect. If we allow everyone to humiliate us and make fun of us, then they will do it even more, and will totally crush us. Self-respect means that we walk away from situations or people where we are insulted constantly. Continuing to stay where we are always insulted, or making friends with people who always tease us and criticize us can have a negative effect on our self-esteem. Such a person will then lose confidence and faith in his own abilities because people around him are always criticizing, insulting and ridiculing him. Bhagavān Krishna therefore says that we should not be 'atimānī' (excessively proud) and instead we should have just enough pride that is sufficient for self-respect. In His own life, when Duryodhana invited him to a feast, Krishna chose to reject his invitation and go to Vidura's home for a simple vegetable dinner saying, "We should eat in other's homes when we are in trouble, or when that other person loves and respects us. I am not in trouble right now, and you have no respect or love for me."

17.4 Harms of Pride:

As expected, being overpowered with pride results in several harms to us.

1. Pride makes us loose a correct perspective of things. We start believing that there is no one as great than we are, and none greater than us, which is never true.
2. Pride earns us many enemies. People start hating us we ourselves start acting in a rash and imprudent way, eventually bring us to ruin.

> Vidura said - Liquors indeed cause intoxication, but the intoxication caused by opulence is worse because a person intoxicated by his wealth regains his senses only after complete destruction. **Mahābhārata 5.34.53**

3. Pride nullifies the fruit of our good karma and makes us an inferior person. Conversely, forsaking pride and arrogance makes as a superior person. **See the story of Ramanuja and Dhanurdasa below.**

> "Austerity (tapas), charity, self-discipline, control over the senses, shame (in doing Adharmic acts), straight-forwardness and compassion towards all creatures – these are the seven gates to happiness. But the feeling of self-pride (or self-importance) envelops these seven with a blinding darkness, and destroys the happiness of all men that results by practicing these seven virtues." **Mahābhārata 1.90.22**

4. Showing pride is considered very cheap behavior. People who are really cultured and mature do not exhibit boastful behavior and they are not proud.

> Garuda said to Indra: Gentleman do not praise their own strength, nor do they describe their good virtues from their own mouth. **Mahābhārata 1.34.2**

> Krishna said to Arjuna: When you speak your own praises, you kill yourself with your own hands. **Mahābhārata 8.70.29**

5. Pride Distances us from Bhagavān: We cannot reach Bhagavān unless we give up our pride, humble ourselves and surrender our heart, mind and soul to His feet. An egotistic person does not acknowledge the greatness of the Divine Power, and cannot accept that all of our gifts in life are from Him. Therefore, this person, covered by the darkness of his ego, can never see the light of Bhagavān. **The story of Madhududana Saraswati below illustrates this point.** Sant Kabir says-

> "As long as there was the 'I', there was no Hari (Bhagavān). And when Hari appeared, there was no longer 'I'. The entire darkness in my life disappeared, when I saw the lamp of the Divine." **Verse of Sant Kabir**

17.5 Ways of Overcoming Pride:

1. **Appreciate the Factors Contributing to your Success** : One must remember that in the accomplishment of any of the goals, several factors are involved and all of the factors must operate effectively for that specific outcome, such as:

- The very capacity to do comes from Bhagavān
- The laws & materials involved
- The contributions of individuals seen & unseen in the accomplishment
- Many other factors known & unknown

Understand that the laws known and unknown, that operate to give one results of actions are uniform and unbiased. Our personal efforts are only one of the factors in determining what we get. Understanding the workings of Karma in this way helps us overcome the belief that we are 'entitled' automatically to rewards for all of efforts. There can be infinite possibilities for the things to go wrong or differently, in spite of one's plans and efforts. Remember the Murphy's Law: if anything can go wrong, it will! Remember the English idiom which goes, "There is many a slip between the cup and the lip." Once an individual recognizes the many factors involved, he/she becomes a more sensitive individual. Such individual understands that there is no basis for arrogance in any accomplishment.

An example would be that whenever a student wins a prize for his or her academic accomplishment (or a prize for sporting competitions), the winner must acknowledge the help that he received from his teachers, coaches, parents, friends and siblings – their encouragement, their training, their money that went into buying books or sporting equipment and so on.

Therefore, to overcome this enemy understand properly a) your strengths b) your weaknesses c) your accomplishments d) your failures and e) your attitude towards them, and then recognize

and acknowledge the part played by so many other individuals and other factors in one's achievements.

2. **Accept Criticism with an Open Mind:** Always stay in close proximity to your critics and pay attention to what they are saying. According to Hindu saints, a critic is one of the best friends that anyone can have, because his comments and criticisms help us improve ourselves, and realize that we are not as perfect or great as we imagine ourselves to me. Sant Kabir has given a very beautiful verse in this regard –

> "Make a hut for your critic and always keep him close to you, because the critic purifies your character without the help of soap or water." **Verse of Sant Kabir**

3. **Vinaya or Practicing the Virtues of Humility and Respect for others:** We will learn more about this later. The fact of life is that what are our accomplishments in our own eyes may not mean much to others! For example, does winning a Spelling Bee contest mean anything to a tribal living in the jungles of Africa, or to a farmer in the United States? Nothing at all! Therefore, all accomplishments have their limitations – most of them really affect us and us alone. There are very few accomplishments that have an impact on many people, and these are better than personal accomplishments. Sant Kabir mocks at people who get puffed up with pride because they are great, but whose power and strength is of no use to others in the following words:

> "So what if you are great? You are like that date palm tree that gives no shade to the traveler, and whose fruit is so high up that it is difficult to get." **Verse of Kabir**

4. **Empathy:** Put yourself in the place of others and try to understand them and their situation. When you do this, you will understand that what you think to be their flaws or their mistakes are not really mistakes. Therefore, you will conclude that there is no reason for you to feel superior and get puffed up.
5. **Pratipaksha Bhāvanā (Thinking the opposite consequences):** Consider the harms that your pride can bring upon you.
6. **Prasāda-Buddhi (Taking everything as the grace of Bhagavān):** Krishna and our Rishis teach that attributing every success and accomplishment or even failure as the will and gift of Bhagavān keeps us free from pride, and also from mental pain. When we are rising in our life, let not this feeling that "It is all due to my intelligence and efforts" come to your mind. Instead, think that "I am blessed that Bhagavān has showered His grace on me and had brought me up here." Likewise, whenever there is a calamity in your life, do not feel low or depressed, but say to yourself, "I accept it as the will of Bhagavān. He is always just and surely must have a plan for me. I will take this misfortune too as His gift, and will start working harder in the hope that He has better things in store for me." **The story of Arjuna below illustrates this method of overcoming pride.**

7. **Dāsya-Bhakti (Regarding yourself as a servant of Bhagavān):** This means doing all our tasks as if we were acting on the constant orders of Bhagavān. As His servant, we are merely doing his bidding. So there is no need to feel puffed up over any achievement because were merely following his orders and direction. Dāsya Bhakti is also an acknowledgement of the fact that Bhagavān alone is the most powerful, most wise, most knowledgeable, the true giver of all that we have and so on. We are very small in front of Him. So there is no reason to be proud and think of ourselves as the greatest. And not only with regard to Bhagavān, our Rishis teach us that we should practice 'Dāsya-Bhakti' also towards other Sants and Bhaktas. This makes us act humbly towards others. **The stories of Ravana and of Dasimaiyya below illustrate this point.**
8. **Appreciation of Achievements of Others:** We can never be the greatest person on earth, nor can we have the maximum amount of all the good qualities, skills and possessions. Others too can be as competent or even more competent than us. Everyone on this earth has some special skill, and is superior to us in some way or the other. Therefore, we should look at others with appreciation, and admire their goodness. This will help us to put ourselves in the right place and understand that we are not the only ones who are great, there are many others too. So, why get proud and arrogant? **The story of Guru Nanak below is a good illustration of this point.**

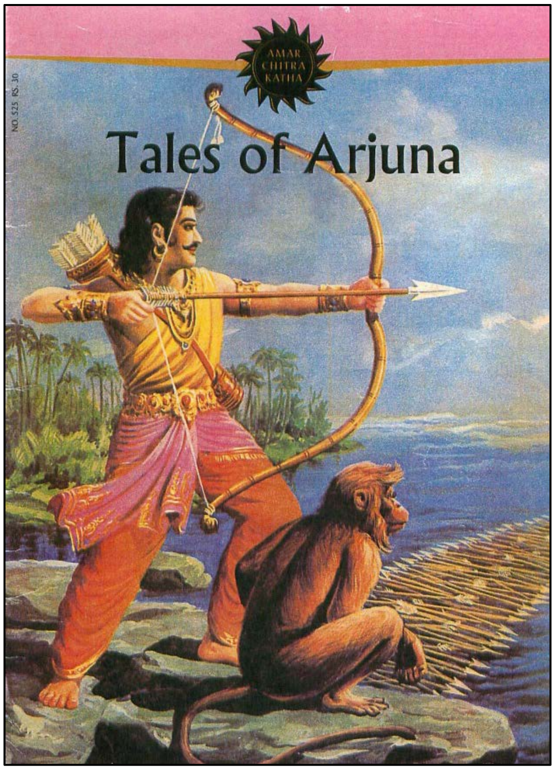
The following words illustrate the last two points above very well:

> "On a dark night glow-worms flying about think that they are removing the darkness. When stars, however, begin to shine, the sky appears brighter and the light of the glow-worms begins to fade. When the moon rises, the light of the stars begins to become dim and faint. When, however, the day dawns at the end of the night, the sun rises and puts out the light of all the luminaries of the night. Likewise, the egotistic self fades into insignificance when the light of the supreme self dawns in its glory." **Swami Sambuddhananda**

Stories on Excessive Pride

STORY: ARJUNA AND HANUMAN MEET AT RAMESHVARAM

Before the Mahabharata war started, Arjuna went on a pilgrimage with some saints to Rameshvaram in south India. There, a Brahmana explained to him how Bhagavān Rama had constructed a bridge of stones with the help of the army of Sugreeva to cross over to Lanka. Arjuna commented with pride, "Rama was a great archer like me. Then why did he have to take the help of monkeys? He could have constructed the bridge with his arrows, just like I can!" The Brahmana felt a bit offended that Arjuna should have insulted Rama. But he kept quiet and went his way.



A monkey who had been following them said to Arjuna, "You are quite foolish. No bridge of arrows could have sustained the weight of monkeys. It would have collapsed by their weight. If you can construct a stronger bridge, I will become your servant!"

"I will show you how. If I fail, I will immolate myself here and now on a pyre," said Arjuna. So, he started shooting arrows after arrows and soon, a bridge of arrows appeared on the ocean, extending out from Rameshvaram towards Lanka!

But as soon as the monkey stepped on the bridge, it collapsed and the monkey fell into the water. So, Arjuna created one bride after the other, stronger than before, but each time, the bridge would collapse no sooner had the monkey taken a few steps. To keep his vow, Arjuna piled a heap of logs and set them alight to commit suicide. But just then, a young man appeared and stopped him. When Arjuna told him the whole story, the young man said, "But wait, a vow is not valid if there was no witness. How can you be so sure that it was the weight of the monkey that caused the bridge to collapse? Try once more."

The monkey agreed and Arjuna constructed one more bridge from his arrows. The monkey started walking on it. But unlike the previous times, the bridge did not collapse! The monkey was none other than Lord Hanuman who could increase his bodily size at will. So, he bloated himself into a giant. But the bridge would still not collapse! Then, Hanuman started jumping on the bridge, but it still stood intact. Hanuman realized that the young man was none other than Bhagavan Rama. Arjuna too realized that the young man was none other than Bhagavan Krishna. They both prostrated at the young man's feet, and immediately, he took his real form as four armed Bhagavan Vishnu of whom both Rama and Krishna are Avataras!

Vishnu said to them, "I came here because Arjuna was being too vain, and because Hanuman was being too proud of his strength. Remember that I am the source of everyone's strength!"

Story: Bhagavan Shiva humbles the pride of Mighty Ravana

Ravana was an evil King who ruled a country called Lanka. He had 10 heads. He had a step brother named Kubera, who was very rich. Ravana attacked Kubera's palace and looted everything that Kubera had. Then, he started returning to Lanka in his flying chariot. Suddenly, the chariot stopped in front of a mountain. He tried a lot, but the chariot would not go above the mountain. He discovered that this mountain was Mount Kailash, on which lived Bhagavān Shiva with Devī Parvati. Ravana was very arrogant and proud of his strength. He did not want to return to Lanka by another route. So he decided to uproot Mount Kailash and then go back to Lanka by the same route that he wanted.

He got off the chariot, and started uprooting the mountain from the earth. The mountain started shaking. All the companions of Shiva and even Devi Parvati became worried and scared. At last, Ravana uprooted the entire mountain and lifted it on his strong arms. But Shiva just smiled. He pressed the mountain with his little toe of the right foot. Immediately, the mountain came crashing on Ravana. Now Ravana was trapped under the mountain. He was getting crushed. Ravana realized that it was wrong of him to be proud of his own strength. Shiva used just the little toe of his foot and was able to crush Ravana under the mountain. Therefore, Ravana apologized to Shiva, and he sang prayers from the Sāmaveda to Him and asked for forgiveness. Bhagavān Shiva forgave Ravana, and asked him to go back to Lanka. This story shows that although Ravana was the most powerful person on this earth, Bhagavan Shiva was able to defeat him very easily by pressing the mountain with his little toe. *No matter how strong we are, we should remember that there is no one who is stronger than Bhagavān because He alone is Almighty, the most powerful!*

Story: Ego Separates Madhusudana Saraswati from Bhagavān

Madhusudana Saraswati was a very renounced scholar of Hinduism in the 17th century. He was born in what is today Bangladesh, and lived in Bengal and Varanasi, where he wrote his famous works like the commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. He also organized the ascetic orders of Dashnami Sannyasins, and opened some of these orders to women and Shudras for admission. A beautiful story is narrated on how he forsake his ego and merged it with Krishna, melting his pride in the love for Krishna.[24]

One day, he was busy writing his classic on Advaita Vedanta called the 'Advaita Siddhi'. Suddenly, a monk entered his study room, and rudely sat on a very high pedestal in front of him. Madhusudana Saraswati was taken aback but immediately upon sitting, the Sadhu asked Madhusudana Saraswati – "Tell me truthfully. During a philosophical debate with another scholar, do you feel agitated in your mind when you are not able to refute or respond to your opponent's arguments?"

"Yes," said Madhusudana Saraswati. The Sadhu then asked, "And when you defeat an opponent, do you feel euphoric?" "Yes," replied Madhusudana Saraswati again.

The Sadhu smiled and said, "You have not shed your ego to the extent that you should have. I recommend that you worship Krishna. In the course of time, you will lose your ego, merge in Krishna, and experience a joy that you cannot get even if you defeat the greatest scholar on this earth in a

[24] Swami Akhandananda Sarasvati (1966), pp. 15-16

debate. You are a great scholar of Advaita Vedanta, but you will get the fruit of your wisdom if you have devotion for Krishna." Then, the Sadhu instructed Madhusudana Saraswati in the 8 syllabled mantra on Krishna and left.

Madhusudana Saraswati chanted the mantra for six months with the correct procedure but he saw no result. So he repeated his religious vow for another six months. But Krishna did not appear to him even in his dreams. Despairing, Madhusudana Saraswati thought, 'What a fool I was to have abandoned my profound study of Advaita Vedanta for the sake of this useless chanting and prayer."

He left Varanasi and went to Kapiladhara – a sacred waterfall close to Amarkantak on the Narmada river in central India. One day, a cobbler (the profession of a cobbler was considered a lowly profession in those days) came to him and said, 'Swami-ji, looks like you have no patience or persistence. You gave up your search for Krishna in a mere twelve months, whereas even the less knowledgeable people spend their entire lifetime in His search."

Madhusudana Saraswati was greatly humbled. "How could this cobbler know what I have been doing in the last one year?" he thought. He asked the cobbler, "How did you find out that I gave up my search for Krishna in a mere 12 months?"

The cobbler replied, "I have pleased a ghost, who tells me secret information about others." Madhusudana Saraswati replied, "I have not been able to see Krishna. Perhaps, you can teach me how to see your ghost. I am willing to humble myself and see that unclean ghost, because he may be able to take me to Krishna."

The cobbler told him the correct procedure to propitiate the ghost. Madhusudana Saraswati now started worshipping the ghost, but when he did not appear even after three days of non-stop prayer, the ascetic got angry. Now he, a scholar, walked himself to the hut of the humble cobbler and asked him why the ghost had not appeared.

The cobbler replied, "My mantra is effective and true indeed. But the ghost is scared to appear in front of you. He says that you have chanted the Gayatri mantra for many years, then the Vedas for a long time. And finally, the mantra of Krishna for a year. All this has made you very powerful. If the ghost appears in front of you, he will get incinerated immediately, and therefore he dare not come to you. The ghost says that you need to have more persistence and patience. Chant the same mantra of Krishna with devotion and faith for six more months, and you will see a magnificent result."

Madhusudana Saraswati was chastened, and he did as the ghost had said. And after six months, when his ego had melted away, and his heart had been filled with the love of Krishna, he had a Divine vision. Moved by this vision, Madhusudana Saraswati then wrote his masterpiece, 'Bhakti-rasāyana' (The Alchemy of Devotion), a famous treatise on the path of Bhakti.

Story: The Pride of Devar Dasimaiyya brings his Downfall

In the 10th cent. C.E. in the Indian state of Karnataka, there lived a great devotee couple of Shiva by the name Devar Dasimaiyya and his wife Thukkalai Devi (also called Duggale) . One day, she procured some

spinning yarn of great quality. With prayers to Shiva on his lips, Dasimaiyya wove out a beautiful piece of cloth depicting the scenes from the stories of Shiva on it. Thukkalai suggested that they should use the cloth for adorning the Mūrti of Shiva in their local Mandir. But Dasimaiyya had other plans, "Let us sell this piece of cloth. We will get a lot of money and this will rid us of our poverty forever."

Dasimaiyya tried to find a suitable buyer but no one could pay enough to justify the excellent quality of the cloth. Finally one day, he saw a Sadhu who worshipped Shiva passing by, and offered the cloth as a gift to him. The Sadhu was overjoyed and in return, he said, "I have only some salt, grains, spices etc., that I had begged for. Let me give these to you." Dasimaiyya returned home with the Sadhu's gifts and his overjoyed wife put these food items in separate jars. Next day, she found that her food jars had miraculously turned 'never-emptying.' Whenever she withdrew some quantity of food from the jar, it filled back. The couple realized that it was none other than Shiva who had blessed them for their devotion. They became using the never-emptying food jars to feed devotees of Bhagavān every day.

But after some time, pride entered the mind of Dasimaiyya and he began thinking, "There is no greater giver than Shiva, and there is no greater receiver of his blessings than I." Shiva then decided to teach him a lesson in humility. There lived another saintly couple, Sankara and his wife with their students. The group toured Mandirs of Shiva frequently in South India. One day, they passed by the village of Dasimaiyya and stayed close to his home. Dasimaiyya was very impressed by their Bhakti towards Shiva. In the morning, Sankara's wife asked one of their students to go around the village and beg for alms. Dasimaiyya heard it and remarked to Sankara and his wife with a tone or arrogance, "Why do you want to go around and beg for food? Shiva has chosen me as His special Bhakta and has given me a never ending supply of food. I can single-handedly take care of all His other Bhaktas."

Sankara was taken aback by Dasimaiyya's arrogance and he replied, "I am glad that you have been blessed by Shiva but it does not behoove you to be arrogant. The same Shiva Who gave you a treasure can also take it back. Prosperity and poverty are all through the grace of Bhagavān alone." Saying this, he picked some trash from a heap in front of them and flung it in the air. The trash immediately turned into gold nuggets before falling back to the ground!

Dasimaiyya was startled and returned home to relate the miracle to his wife, and explained how this was a result of his insulting the saint with his pride. She had something else to tell him, "Our pots of food have stopped refilling on their own. Perhaps this is the result of the insult caused to the saint. We should go and apologize to the saint, and also ask Shiva to forgive us." The couple returned to Sankara who said, "Remember that all riches in life are the blessings of Bhagavān alone and you can retain them only till you remain humble. When a Bhakta becomes proud and arrogant, Bhagavān Shiva takes back his blessings. But you have realized your mistakes now and have learned the importance of humility in life. Therefore, Shiva will bless you back with sufficient food and resources."

The pots of food in Dasimaiyya and Thukkalai started filling up again and they spent the rest of their lives feeding the Bhaktas of Bhagavān. Dasimaiyya himself became a great saint in his later stages of life and wrote beautiful poems in praise of Shiva. He spread the worship of Shiva among the wild tribes in the region that lived by hunting. He asked them to give up eating meat and instead earn their livelihood by

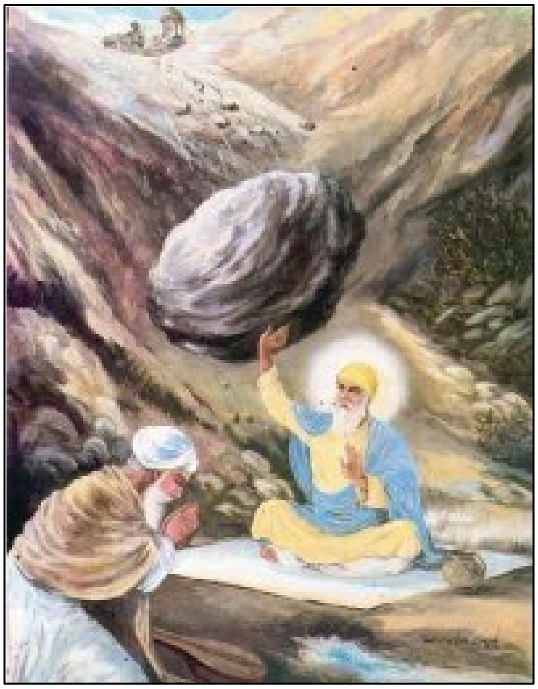
extracting oil from seeds and selling the same. Under his influence, the local King also became a follower of Bhagavān Shiva.

Story: Guru Nanak crushes the pride of Sufi Wali Kandhari

In the year 1521, Guru Nanak visited Hasan Abdal, a place in northern Pakistan, where there was a hill at the top of which there was a spring of fresh water. This spring was the only source of fresh water in the region, and it flowed down from the hill to the town below. A few years earlier, a Muslim Afghan Sufi (Sufis are Muslim saints who follow the path of spirituality, but many of them were also religious warriors who fought against non-Muslims) named Wali Kandhari settled down next to the spring.

In the course of time, people of that time started paying visits to Wali Kandhari and offer respects to him. His little hut became a center for pilgrimage. Wali Kandhari now became proud, and he started using his influence to harass the Hindus and persuade them to convert to Islam.

When Guru Nanak visited the area, the locals were very impressed by his spirituality and teachings, and began to flock to him for his darshan. This really hurt the pride of Wali Kandhari, and he became jealous and angry. As a result, he shut the spring on his hill, depriving the town below of all water. The people then appealed to the Sufi to resume their water supply, but he scornfully said, "Ask your Guru Nanak for water because now you respect him and not me." When the people went to Guru Nanak, he said, "Do not worry because Bhagavān takes care of everyone." Guru Nanak then sent his Muslim disciple Mardana up the hill with a request to release the source of water. But the Sufi got angry with him, abused him and sent him back. Guru Nanak asked Mardana to go back several times and ask for water humbly, but each time, he was abused by Wali Kandhari and asked to get lost.



Finally, Guru Nanak lifted a rock where he was sitting, and miraculously, a clear stream of water appeared at that spot! Meanwhile, the spring at the top of the hill where Wali Kandhari lived dried up. The Sufi was mad at this, and he pushed a huge boulder from the hill towards Guru Nanak, thinking that the Guru will be crushed to death. But Guru Nanak sat still, with a calm mind. As soon as the boulder reached Guru Nanak, he merely touched it, and the boulder stopped immediately! Wali Kandhari was shocked because it was humanly impossible for such a huge boulder hurtling down at that speed to get stopped. He realized that Guru Nanak was a great Sant, and he came down from the hill and apologized to him. Guru Nanak asked him to give up his pride and anger, and treat all human beings, irrespective of their religion, as children of Bhagavān.

Even today, the spring that had appeared miraculously at the base of the mountain still exists and a beautiful Sikh shrine (Gurudwara) was constructed about 200 years back at the site with a pool filled with clear water coming from that spring. The shrine also has the boulder with a clear imprint of the hand of Guru Nanak.

STORY: DHANURDĀSA AND RĀMĀNUJA

When Shri Ramanuja became old, he needed support to walk. Every morning, he would take a bath in the river Kaveri and then return to the temple, leaning in the shoulders of Dhanurdasa. This annoyed some of his followers who said, "Dhanurdasa was a foolish person in the past. Moreover, he is not born in a great family of Brahmanas. Why don't you lean on the shoulder of one of the more prominent of your disciples?"

Ramanuja replied, "Knowledge, birth in a great family and wealth can make one arrogant. Dhanurdasa does not have any of these three types of arrogance. The Kaveri river's water can only clean my external body. But the man's heart and mind can only be cleaned by the touch of a person like Dhanurdasa, who has no arrogance of wealth, knowledge or birth in an elitist family."

Further Reading: *"Vedanta and the Resolution of Human Ego"* by Chitra Raman at http://chitraraman.voiceofdharma.org/articles/general/the-relevance-of-vedanta-to-modern-life

18. Mātsarya (Jealousy): The Sixth Internal Enemy

18.1 What is Mātsarya?

The word 'Mātsarya' literally means the feeling of jealousy when 'someone else gets ahead of us.' Shankaracharya defines jealousy as "a state of intolerance born by seeing excellence in someone else." Jealousy is a feeling of wanting to have something that other person has and resenting that person for having it! If we are honest, all of us would admit that we all have or still do experience this feeling. It usually arises out of comparing oneself to another. If one sees or perceives that the other individual has possessions and/or desirable qualities that one feels one lacks, the other individual is perceived as superior.

18.2 Harmful Effects of Jealousy:

1. ***Mental and Physical Harms of Jealousy:*** In a fit of jealousy, we can go to the extent of harming the other person. But even if we do not do that, we still end up harming ourselves. Jealousy is a very negative feeling that lowers our mood and saps our mental and physical strength. Once jealousy arises, it is difficult to get rid of. Just as fire has the capacity to grow and consume whatever is placed in it, so too jealousy has the power to grow and consume the individual who nurses it. In many Indian languages the word for jealousy means "to burn." The mere sight of possessions or accomplishments of others gives us a sense of deprivation and smallness. We become more and resentful of our condition because we start feeling that we deserve better. Indeed, jealousy has the effect of shortening our life-span.

> The feeling jealousy towards others shortens one's life span. Therefore, jealousy should be forsaken. **Mahābhārata 13.140.137**
>
> Just like the inert and non-living earth does not have a living mind, and just like a corpse's mind does not work, in the same way, the mind of a jealous person is dead. **Atharvaveda 6.18.2**

2. ***Hinders the success of others and oneself:*** Overcome by jealousy, we start spending more time probing the progress of the other person, instead of focusing on our own progress. As a result, we get farther and farther behind in the race of this world. Conversely, a person who is free of jealousy towards others is always successful in life. In this connection, a wonderful example is given of how jealous creatures neither progress themselves, nor do they let others progress. If we put a dozen crabs in a class jar, some of them start

climbing up the wall to escape. But the moment they climb up a little, the crabs at the bottom pull them down. When other crabs climb up, they get pulled down too. No crab is able to get out, because they keep getting pulled down by other crabs. But the crabs who pull down others do not get out themselves too, because they are just too busy pulling down others! Therefore, in the Mahābhārata, Bhīshma says -

> That person who is not jealous of the wealth of others, and is not attached to luxuries of life is indeed a saint, and will always overcome his life's adversities. **Mahābhārata 12.110.17**

3. ***We claim credit for the Success and Hard Work of Others:*** An English proverb goes, "Success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan." When a project succeeds, everyone wants to claim credit for it because they are afraid that the person who gets the credit might earn a promotion, an award or a lot of praise. Even people have had little or no role in the success of a project want to claim credit for the hard work or guidance that they really never provided. On the contrary, when a project fails, everyone washes their hands off and claims they had nothing to do with it! This is obviously very unethical behavior, which arises from a combination of ego, jealousy and dishonest.
4. ***Loss of a Balanced Outlook:*** When we are jealous of someone, we start exaggerating their faults, or even invent faults that do not exist. We view the positive qualities of others in a negative light. In other words, we lost the correct and objective perspective of others.
5. ***We take to Unethical Ways Ourselves:*** A particularly dangerous situation arises when we become jealous of people who have used unethical and illegal means to achieve their success. Overpowered by our jealousy, we start believing that we too can succeed and beat them only if we too start using unethical and illegal means like them. And before long, we hurtle down the path of evil and use every trick of the trade to become 'successful' without caring whether what we are doing is right or wrong, and whether our actions are hurting others.
6. ***Jealousy is Bad Karma:*** When our driver towards success is jealousy of others, the fruit of our hard work is also tainted with the evil of jealous. Bhagavān does not give us the fruit of our efforts fully when they are inspired by jealousy for the success of others. **The story of Rishi Narada and Gandharva Tumburu below illustrates this very well.**

18.3 Overcoming Jealousy:

1. **Pratipaksha-Bhāvanā**: The best way to deal with it is with Pratipakshabhāvanā. It means first accepting one's feelings, and then making deliberate attempt to replace them with the opposite, understanding that everyone has positive qualities (e.g. Rama teaching Lakshmana, who is given to anger, and makes erroneous judgments and talks harshly about their father Dasharatha and his stepmother Kaikeyi.). One first needs to recognize this kind of feeling, earlier the better. Then one should carefully examine its origin and understand it to be illegitimate, since it is not based upon a complete examination of the object of jealousy. It is always helpful to invoke positive thoughts and feelings about others' accomplishments and gains every step of the way in our life. That way we may improve our attitude and actions for our ultimate improvement.

2. **Karma-Gati-Vichāra**: Recognize that all of one's gains are the direct results of one's own actions. Sometimes, these actions were done in the present lifetime, and sometimes in previous lifetimes. Therefore, if the other person is becoming successful, then he must have done something good in his earlier years in this life, or in his previous lives.
3. **Pancha-Karmayoni-Jnāna:** Understand that the laws known and unknown, that operate to give one results of actions are uniform and unbiased. Our personal efforts are only one of the factors in determining what we get. Understanding the workings of Karma in this way helps us overcome the belief that we are 'entitled' automatically to rewards for all of efforts. Therefore, when the other person gets a promotion, a prize or something else that we thought we ought to have, then we should assume that there were some unknown factors beyond our present control that lead to this outcome. One of these factors is called 'luck' in everyday language. This understanding helps us accept the success of others and our own failure with grace and without the feeling of jealousy arising in our mind.
4. **Dhriti**: Fortitude or perseverance. Do not lose heart but continue to work hard for what one desires. Jealousy is a negative feeling which causes us to wallow in self-pity and indulge in hatred and anger towards the successful person. But fortitude keeps driving us to continue to work harder and it is then just a matter of time before we too become successful.
5. **Prasāda-buddhi:** Appreciate the grace of Bhagavān in whatever is given as a result of one's actions. When we acknowledge that everything comes from Bhagavān, Who is completely just, then we start treating the success of others too as His grace.
6. **Maitri:** Friendship towards all. Typically, we are jealous of 'other' people who are not very close to us. It is comparatively rare to see a child who is jealous of his parents; and rare to see a parent who is jealous of the success of his or her child. We actually feel elated when our children, parents and best friends do good because we consider their success as our own success. Similarly, if we were to think of everyone as a close friend in this world, then we will always treat their success and prosperity as ours, and will no longer feel jealous towards them.
7. **Muditā:** Delighting in the success of others. One must make a conscious attempt to check any feelings of resentment, unhappiness, hatred or jealousy that crop up in our mind when we see the success of others. Likewise, we should make a deliberate attempt to feel delighted and happy at the success of others.

18.4 Jealousy and other Evils:

Jealousy can combine with other evils with a disastrous effect. The Sanskrit language has several words to name the combinations of jealousy with other evils.

Jealousy + vainglorious nature = Asūyā. Such a person cannot tolerate the praise of anyone else, be he an elder, a friend, spouse, one's own son etc.

Jealousy + Greed = Mātsarya. A person with this flaw becomes upset when he sees others acquiring material possessions, or when others prosper in their life. He says to himself, "How come he is overtaking me in success? I too should get the same things in my life, probably even better things."

Jealousy + Desire = Anger

18.5 Distinction between Jealousy and Healthy Competition:

Jealous does not mean that we do not compete with anyone. Everything in life involves some amount of competition between us and others, whether it is a position in your high school tennis team, or whether it is a job when you graduate. There are only limited opportunities available in life, and there are more applicants than the number of these opportunities or positions.

Competitiveness means that you should try to keep learning new skills, become more and more qualified and capable in life, and become more 'saleable' due to your unique skills and qualifications. When you compete with someone else for the same position, you should be motivated and driven by your own success, and not by the desire to put the other person down. You should put your best foot forward in front of the interviewer or any other person who will make the selection, and highlight your special skills. In this way, you will be a 'healthy competitor' and not a lowly and degraded 'jealous person'.

18.6 Causes of Jealousy between Students:

Follow are some examples of situations that can cause you jealousy:

1. Your classmate appears more 'cool' and is more popular than you are. He has more girlfriends and is more handsome.
2. Your friend has richer parents, and he wears more expensive brands of shoes and clothes, and has more electronic gadgets than you have.
3. Your classmate scores higher grades than you.
4. Your neighborhood friend is praised more than you by people in the neighborhood.

You must constantly watch for this situations and correct yourself should you feel jealous.

Stories on Jealousy:

The Jealousy of Kekeyi in the Ramayana: King Dashratha of Ayodhya had three wives – Kausalya, Kekeyi and Sumitra. Rama, the eldest son of Dasharatha from Kausalya was the favorite of all the three mothers, and of the people of the kingdom. Therefore, he was declared the crown prince. However, just a day before the public declaration that he is the crown prince, Manthara, the maid of Kekeyi, poisoned her years. She convinced her that if Rama became the king after Dasharatha, then her status will get reduced to that of a maid of Kausalya. This evil advice sowed the seeds of jealousy in the mind of Kekeyi. She forgot that Rama was her favorite son as well, and not Bharata who was her biological son. But overcome by jealousy, she manipulated Dasharatha. As a result of her machinations, Rama had to go to the jungle for 14 years, and her own son Bharata was declared the crown prince.

The Jealousy of Duryodhana in the Mahabharata: Yudhishthira, the nephew of King Dhritarashtra of Hastinapura, was deemed to be the crown prince. However, Duryodhana, the eldest son of Dhritarashtra wanted to be the king instead, after his father. Duryodhana was extremely jealous of Yudhishthira and his four brothers, who were epitomes of nobility, virtue and bravery. Out of jealousy, Duryodhana tried to kill his five cousins (called the Pandavas) numerous times, and threw

tantrums that Yudhishthira and not he was declared as the crown prince. Overcome by his 'moha' for Duryodhana, Dhritarashtra divided his kingdom into two halves. The barren western half was unfairly given to the Pandavas, and the fertile eastern half containing the capital was given to Duryodhana. But through their hard work and the guidance of Krishna, the Pandavas soon converted their part of the kingdom into a prosperous land. They built a fabulous capital called Indraprastha.

Duryodhana was once again overcome by jealousy and through various intrigues, he usurped the half ruled by the Pandavas. According to their agreement, the Pandavas were supposed to go in exile for 13 years, and then get back their half of the kingdom. But when the period of exile was over, Duryodhana refused to return their kingdom to them. Blinded by his jealousy for the Pandavas, he believed that the entire kingdom belonged to him alone. This resulted in the great war of the Mahabharata between the Pandavas on one side, and Duryodhana and his brothers on the other. The results of this civil war were catastrophic, and millions died – all due to the jealousy of Duryodhana for his cousins.

Story: The Jealousy of Rishi Nārada makes him an Inferior Musician

Gandharva Tumburu and Rishi Nārada were both great devotees of Vishnu. Once, they both went to Vaikuntha where Tumburu sang a melodious hymn in praise of Vishnu and Lakshmi. Please with his song, They presented him many divine jewels and clothes. Nārada became jealous of Tumburu. He decided to please Bhagavān Shiva to learn music from Him and become the best musician. Shiva was pleased, but Vishnu and Lakshmi still did not feel impressed enough with his music to give jewels and clothes to Nārada as gifts.

Nārada then practiced music for several years in the hope that he would best Tumburu. But even that was not sufficient. Finally, Nārada decided to give up his jealousy and hatred towards Tumburu. Therefore, he approached Tumburu and requested him to teach music. Tumburu agreed, and taught Nārada all that he knew. Thereafter, Nārada went to Dwaraka and sang a song for Krishna who said, "Now your music is indeed wonderful, because it is not tainted with jealousy." Saying this, Krishna then gave some divine gifts to Nārada in appreciation.

Internet Research Assignments:

1. Find out about the controversy surrounding Nancy Kerrigan and Tanya Harding

19. Ostentation or Hypocrisy:

19.1 What is Dambha?

"Dambhitva means present a false image of one's greatness. This attitude reveals a greater sense of insecurity and self-nonacceptance [than mānitva]. One who has this attitude lives a life of deceit, having a need to project himself as different from what he is. Even lying about one's age reveals a difficulty in accepting one's age. The deceit can get more complex until one almost starts believing one's own bluff."[25]

People with this quality pretend to be virtuous when in reality they are quite evil in their hearts. They make a big show of any little act of charity or worship that they do but in reality, they lack faith in God and in the scriptures. Everything is done for a show or publicity, for fame and glory. This may impress their followers and other foolish people, but God only cares about the faith and truth in our hearts. Lord Krishna describes the qualities of these people in great detail in verses Gita 16.13-18.

These three are given as examples of Dambha in the realm of Hindu Dharma:

> "Keeping long hair to pretend that he practices Yoga even though he does not, pretend that he is practicing a spiritual vow even while not observing the rules of the vow, or pretending to be a celibate when in fact he has relationships with women – these three are called 'dambha.'" **Matsya Purāṇa 175.42**

A person who has this flaw of character pretends to be better than who he is, but from time to time, his true and shallow behavior does become manifest to others. Therefore, Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa likens a hypocrite to an eagle that soars very high in the sky and yet always keeps its eyes on mice other creatures on the ground. Time to time, the eagle descends rapidly from its soaring heights and plunges down to catch its prey crawling on the ground.

Hypocrisy is severely condemned in the Hindu scriptures, and many analogies are given to describe this type of a person. A Sanskrit person likens a hypocrite to a pot of poisonous fluid, but whose neck and

mouth are smeared with milk. The onlooker falsely believes that the pot holds milk inside it when it actually contains poison. Another example is that of the Indian egret, which often stands in ponds only on one of its legs, reminding one of Sadhus who meditate by standing on a single leg for a long time. But as soon as it spots a fish in the water, the bird swoops down and catches the prey with its beak. A third example given in the Manusmriti is that of a

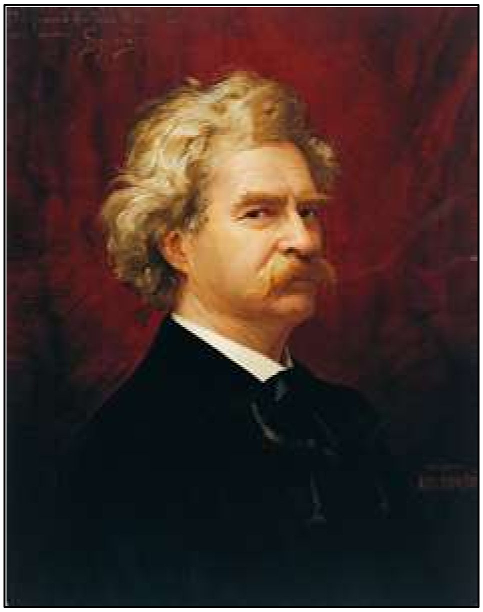
male cat, which walks with its head lowered (reminding one of a humble pious person) but in reality keeping an eye out for any rat that crawls by. As soon as the cat sees the rat, it swoops and catches it.

Sant Kabir mocks at ostentatious and hypocritical worshippers in the following words:

> The rosary of beads turns around in your hands, the tongue keeps moving in your mouth and your mind turns around in every direction – how can this be contemplation of Bhagavān? Verse of Kabir

19.2 The Disconnect between Practice and Preaching

A dambhi person preaches one thing and practices the other. This beautiful incident from the life of the American author Mark Twain illustrates how a hypocritical person ought to be shown a mirror to see his reality-



"Once the great writer Mark Twain was having a discussion with a businessman who was known for being aggressive and ruthless in his dealings with others.

The businessman said to the writer, "Before I die, I would like to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and climb on top of Mount Sinai to read the Ten Commandments aloud at the top."

Mark Twain quickly replied, "I have a better idea. Rather than go to Mount Sinai where Moses was given the Ten Commandments, why don't you stay home here in Boston and practice the Ten Commandments in your life?"[26]

Stories Illustrating Dambha

Story: The Show-Off Bhakti of Indra

Once, Rishi Durvāsā went to Amarāvatī, the capital of heaven, and noticed that a big festival was taking place. Upon enquiry, Rishi Nārada told him that as it was the full moon day, Indra was worshipping Devi with great pomp and show. Rishi Durvāsā thoroughly enjoyed himself in the festival, in which thousands of golden plates of with flowers were used for the worship of Devi.

After the festival was over, Durvāsā went to visit Devi, but was told that she had taken ill. When he went to see her, he was aghast to see that there were boils all over her body. "What happened," he asked. The Devi replied, "All these flowers that were thrown on my Mūrti caused boils to appear wherever the

[26] Rajinder Singh, pp. 112-113

flowers touched me. The only medicine to cure these boils is available with the physician who is right now at the Vishālākshī Mandir in the holy city of Varanasi.

Durvāsā rushed to the Mandir, but he merely found an old and poor man worshipping the Devi, and shedding tears at the feet of her Mūrti. He asked the old man for the whereabouts of the physician, only to be told that he does not know of any physician close to the Mandir. Dejected, Durvāsā went back to the Devi to give her the bad news.

But when he reached the door of the palace of Devi, he heard the sound of Her anklets. When he went inside, he saw that the Devi was fully cured, and she was dancing joyously while her attendants were playing different musical instruments. "Did the physician come here to give you the medicine, because I was not able to locate him in the Mandir," said Rishi Durvāsā to her.

The Devi laughed and said, "You do not understand. The physician was none other than my true devotee, the old and poor man whom you met in the Mandir. The tears of his Bhakti that fell on my Mūrti totally cured my disease. Indra had organized a very grand festival to worship me. But it was a mere show off. There was no faith or Bhakti in Indra's worship, and therefore, all the offerings of flowers and food made me fall ill. But the true devotion of the old man, even though he did not offer me anything, cured me of all illness. His tears were more valuable to me than all the flowers, gold and food that Indra and his servants had offered to me."

Story: The Man who became a Sadhu for a single Day

Keshavadas spent a lot of time doing his worship every day. He was very meticulous about all the steps of the Puja, and demanded that his wife Kamala had everything that he needed for the Puja ready every day. But, Kamala had a lot of other things to do as well – cooking, cleaning, laundry and so on. She often did some mistake in arranging the large number of items that Keshavdas used for his worship. As a result, he would yell at her.

Finally one day, greatly upset after getting a scolding from him, she approached her Guru Santoba Powar, a very famous saint of his times. The saint asked her to convey the message to her husband that he will accept Keshavdas as a disciple and make him ready to become a Sadhu like himself. Kamala was crestfallen at the thought of losing her husband, but she could not disregard the advice of her Guru. When Keshavdas heard her Guru's message, he became elated and said, "I always told you that I was destined to be a great religious leader. The famous Santoba Power had himself expressed a wish to make me his student."

So next day, Keshavdas set out to see Santoba Powar. On his way, he imagined returning after years of meditation as a famous saint in his own right. "Then, my wife and family members will understand what a spiritual person I am," he thought.

When Keshavdas appeared in front of the saint, he was asked to immediately throw away his robes of silk and his ornaments and take a bath in the river. In the hope of become a renowned Sadhu himself, Keshavdas followed the command immediately. When he returned from his bath, the saint said, "I have very special clothes for you, which you will now wear henceforth as a Sadhu." Keshavdas imagined that his Guru will give him a flowing saffron robe, which will make him look very saintly. But lo! The guru merely gave him a loin cloth to cover his modesty. Then, the Guru gave him a pot of ashes to smear on his body saying, "They symbolize the fact that you are now dead to the world." Keshavdas' stomach squirmed at the thought of smearing himself with these ashes and pretend to be a corpse, but he faked a smile and followed his Guru's command.

Then the Guru said, "Now it is time to mediate. You will sit in that corner of my cave and meditate on the Mantra 'Ram Ram' for 6 hours." Keshavdas was aghast! He had always imagined himself as meditating on lofty Himalayan peaks, chanting mantras sonorously and pilgrims falling at his feet with gifts. But now actually chanting these mantras in a dark cave seemed so different from his mental fantasy!" Keshavdas grudgingly started chanting, as directed. The six hours were torture for him, and many a times, his mind wandered away to think of his comfortable home, the loving service of his wife, and the wonderful clothes and sandals that he used to wear!

Finally, he heaved a sigh of relief when the six hours of meditation were over. Then Santoba Powar called him and said, "It is time for food now. And yes, we should keep a fast today. But if you want to eat, you can take my begging bowl and request the villagers to give you some food. And while coming back, collect some firewood because it will be cold and we need to light a bonfire while sleeping." Keshavdas was even more dejected. He thought, "I am a very respectable person. How can my Guru expect me to beg for food – this is just so demeaning! And then, he asks me to collect wood for the fire. Anyway, let me go through this torture too, because one day I will be a famous saint myself. And then I can have many other disciples of my own to do all this work for me!"

When Keshavdas returned with the firewood, his Guru said, "Now it is time to sleep." "But where do we sleep? I see no bed," replied Keshavdas. The Guru instructed, "A Sadhu sleeps on whatever is available. This rocky cave today is our bed. Now be cheerful and have a good sleep." Keshavdas laid on the ground. But no matter how hard he tried, he could not sleep. Sometimes a stone pinched his back. Another time,

he was woken up by the howling of wolves. Finally, Keshavdas lost it and woke up his Guru, “Gurudev, I cannot take it. Perhaps, I just do not have the inner strength that it takes to be a Sadhu. I am not fit for this role that I had fantasized about all my life. I realize now that what we desire is not the same as reality. I merely imagined myself to be capable of becoming a saint, and put up a good show of being a religious man. But now I know that I am just an ordinary person. Please forgive me and allow me to return to my home and to my wife.”

Santoba Powar smiled and said to Keshavdas, “I give you permission to return tomorrow morning. But do not get disheartened. All your efforts will not go in vain, because in the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavān Krishna has promised to us that no good effort will get lost. But keep two things in mind in your life always. The first is that you have believed incorrectly that you can become a Saint only if you give up your family ties to your wife etc., and only if you perform grand worships every day. The truth is that it is not the external abandonment of your family and home or the external worship that makes one a saint. What makes one a saint is that your mind and heart should be pure, and that they should always be directed towards Bhagavān. So go home and be a good husband. And remember that even if your wife does a small mistake in make available all the items of your worship, they will get overcome if you have love, faith and Bhakti in your heart.

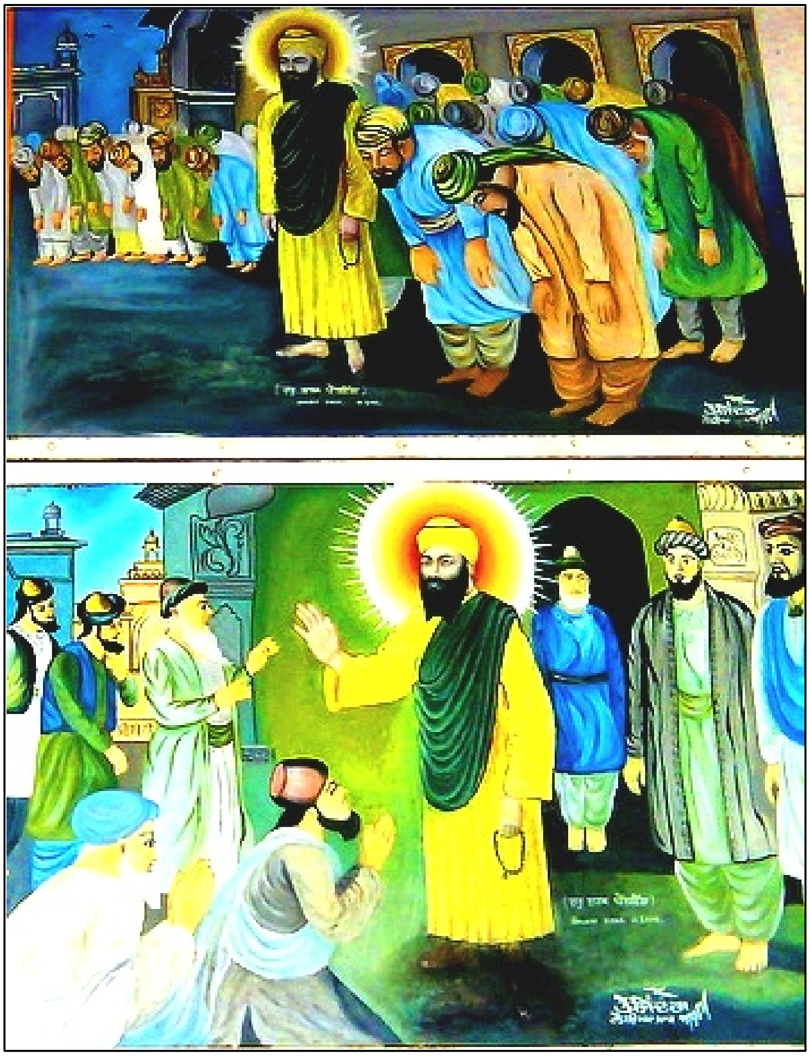
And now the second thing – Never get disheartened. You have tried to be a Sadhu for one day but gave up so easily. This does not mean that you will never make spiritual progress. I want you to take small steps, while fulfilling all your duties towards your family every day. I want you to bear all your challenges and problems in life patiently, calmly and quietly, without making a show. And you will notice yourself that over time, you will be a changed, and a better person in whose heart Bhagavān has come to reside. Keep in mind that becoming a Sadhu is not the only way of reaching Bhagavān because He Himself puts us in the correct circumstances after determining what is best for our soul.”

Story: Guru Nanak exposes the Hypocrisy of the Nawab and Qazi of Sultanpur

After his enlightenment, Guru Nanak once passed by a group of Muslims in Sultanpur (in district Kapurthala, Punjab, India) performing Namaz- the traditional way of Islamic worship that all believing Muslims are supposed to do five times every day. Guru Nanak commented – the true five prayers are speaking the truth, earning one’s bread by hard labor, asking God for the good of everyone, keeping one’s intentions and feelings pure, and fifth, chanting the praises of God.

The Muslim worshippers got very offended and thought that Guru Nanak was insulting their religion, by implying that the Islamic way of offering the five prayers was not correct. Sultan Daulat Khan, who ruled the estate of Sultanpur, did not seem perturbed by the Muslim cleric got very angry. He said to Nanak, “You say that there is no difference between Hindus and Muslims. So why don’t you join us in our prayers in the mosque?” Guru Nanak agreed.

However, as the cleric started calling out the Islamic prayer, causing the Muslim worshippers do the gestures required by their tradition, Guru Nanak just stood still in his place. And in fact, he burst out aloud into laughter twice! The cleric was further enraged and urged the Sultan to proclaim a severe punishment to Nanak for insulting Islam.



When Nawab Daulat Khan asked Nanak for the cause of his laughter, the latter replied, “How could I join in the prayers when the cleric himself was not praying? He was merely uttering words from the Koran without any sincerity because in his mind, he was worried that the new calf that he had purchased recently might fall into the well in his home while he was here, leading the prayers. And you Sultan, were not really saying your prayers whole-heartedly either. Instead, you were thinking all the time about whether your agents in Kabul had clinched the deal for buying horses or not.”

Everyone was shocked when the cleric as well as the Sultan confessed that they were indeed not praying whole-heartedly and what Guru Nanak had said about them was in fact correct. The Sultan fell at the feet of Guru Nanak and asked for forgiveness. Guru Nanak forgave him and advised him to be a just ruler that worked always for the welfare of his people.

19.3 Students and ‘Dambha’: Plagiarism as a form of Dambha

Plagiarism means passing off someone else’s research or work as one’s own without attributing it to the original source. Plagiarism is a serious offense. If caught, the student indulging in plagiarism can suffer all his life, and get denied admission (or dismissed from his college) for his misconduct. Plagiarism can happen due to many reasons: Delusion (“I will never get caught”); laziness; incompetence or greed (for fame when the student does not deserve it). Plagiarism is a form of ‘dambha’ because through it, the student tries to pretend that he or she is more smart, hardworking and resourceful than what he actually is.

Further Research: Study the example of Kaavya Viswanathan to understand how allegations of plagiarism can have a disastrous effect on your life. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_Opal_Mehta_Got_Kissed,_Got_Wild,_and_Got_a_Life

20. Harshness or Cruelty

20.1 What is Harshness or Cruelty?

Harshness is the opposite of compassion, mercy and gentleness. In extreme cases, harshness involves a total lack of gentleness and compassion. At this point, it becomes cruelty. The characteristics of people who show harshness and cruelty are:

1. They are very hard-hearted, obstinate, cruel and non-budging. In the name of following rules, they do not care whether the rules are causing more harm than benefit.
2. They do not have any mercy in their heart for others.
3. They are rude in the name of being 'straightforward', and do not treat others with gentleness.
4. Sometimes, they are outright violent and commit unspeakable acts of violence and injury.

In the Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11, it is said that if we are uncertain of the right course of action and are confused about what we ought to do, then we should approach learned Brahmanas who are lovers of justice and Dharma, doers of good deeds, who are not led blindly by others (but by their own understanding of Dharma) and also **who are not harsh**.

But just because someone is harsh in his mannerisms does not mean that he is a bad person. Conversely, a gentle person is not necessarily better than a harsh person, if that gentle person hides deceit and dishonest (or other vices) behind his soft speech and cultured behavior. Therefore, we must not judge people superficially just by seeing their harsh behavior.

Story: The Harsh Behavior of Swami Virajananda

An example to understand this is to study the character of Swami Virajananda, the Guru of Swami Dayananda Saraswati in the 19th cent. C.E. The former was a very quick tempered and a harsh person. He was the teacher of Princes in a Rajput kingdom in western India and was very meticulous about punctuality. One day, the Princes arrived a bit late. Swami Virajananda immediately packed up his bags and left the kingdom to move to Mathura, another city in N India, because he had zero tolerance for his students arriving late.

A few years later, Swami Dayananda became his student (around 1851 CE). The Guru would get annoyed at little things and even hit his grown up students. One day, Swami Dayananda swept the floor of his Guru's room and heaped the garbage in a corner to pick it up soon. Suddenly, the Guru arrived and stepped on the heap of garbage. He flew into a rage and beat Dayananda with a stick. But despite his Guru's harsh behavior, Dayananda did not get upset. Instead, he started massaging

the hands of his Guru saying, 'Gurudev, I am young and my body is very sturdy but your arms are weak. I apologize if I have caused a pain to your arms."

Swami Dayananda knew that his Guru was very knowledgeable and kind hearted, and therefore he did not get upset by the harshness of his behavior.

To understand these vices better, read the chapters on compassion and gentleness later in this book.

20.2 Scriptural Quotations on Harshness and Cruelty:

Bheeshma said – Do not hurt anyone's heart, do not utter words of cruelty, do not put down others and do not speak harsh words that cause turmoil in their minds. These types of speech takes the speaker to hell, therefore do not speak this way. **Mahābhārata 13.104.31**

Bheeshma said – How can someone desire to kill another while wanting to live himself? Therefore, we should make available for others all those things that we desire for ourselves. **Mahābhārata 12.259.22**

21. Ignorance

In Christianity and Judaism, the Bible says that when God created Adam and Eve, the first pair of human beings, they were totally ignorant. God forbade the couple to eat fruit from the tree of knowledge, threatening to banish them from the paradise like garden of Eden if they disobeyed Him. However, a serpent tempted Eve who tempted Adam to eat the fruit, as a result of which their ignorance disappeared and they became a bit knowledgeable. God became very angry with this act of disobedience and banished Adam and Even to live on the earth. He also cursed the woman that she will have painful child-births and cursed the snake that he will always crawl on dirt and that humans will fear and hate the creature and try to kill it.

In the Hindu Dharma however, we believe just the opposite. It is not knowledge, but ignorance that keeps us away from Bhagavān. Therefore, one of the ways to reach Bhagavān is to eat the fruit of knowledge (so to speak) and get rid of our ignorance. In fact, Hindus believe that far from being a virtue, ignorance is actually an evil.

Some people have no knowledge or wisdom and they do not want to acquire these either! They have no respect for education or learning. They only worship money and power and do not honor learned people. Hindu Dharma teaches us that only knowledge (Vidyā or Jnāna) can lead us to true happiness and eternal companionship with Bhagavān.

We will read more about what Jnāna is in section V of this book.

22. Hatred or Enmity

22.1 Hatred, the great Evil

Extreme ignorance, anger or jealousy leads to hatred or enmity due to which we want to attack, overpower, weaken or destroy the object of our hatred.

Hindu scriptures ask us to give up hatred for others, and instead practice love, compassion, kindness, ahimsā, gentleness and respect towards others:

> Dhritarashtra says to Duryodhana (quoting Prahlada) – Not bearing enmity towards any creature in mind, word or dead; having compassion for everyone and giving charity to the best of one's ability – these are the praiseworthy virtues. Any personal efforts that do not benefit others, and doing which causes guilt in one's mind must never be carried out. Do only those deeds that will get you praise in a full assembly of men. This in brief I have told you the definition of Dharma. **Mahābhārata 12.124.66-68**
>
> "Even at times of calamity, a noble man should desist from harboring ill-will or enmity towards others. He is like the sandalwood tree that imparts its fragrance even to the axe blade that strikes it down." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 78**
>
> "Foolish people never give up enmity, just as a line drawn on a rock cannot be erased. But the wise forgive and forget, their enmity is as ephemeral as a line drawn on the surface of water." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 64**

22.2 Manifestations of Hatred

1. Racism: Disliking, using derogatory words against (e.g. 'Nigger') and discriminating against, and even slaughtering people because they belong a different ethnic group than yourself, or because they have a different physical appearance ('phenotype') than yourself. Modern anthropologists have proved conclusively that people cannot be distinguished into different races on the basis of genetics. This means, we all have the same biological and anatomical make up, and the difference lies only in our superficial experience. And yet, it is amazing how much hatred a lot of people have against others. In the 1930s and 1940s, Hitler led German soldiers to slaughter 6 million (out of the total world population of 12 million) Jews because he believed Jews to be racially inferior and evil. Hitler was not the first one to hate the Jews though, as they have been hated and persecuted throughout history in Christian and Islamic countries. The only two places where they did not suffer hatred and discrimination were Hindu India and in China. Hatred directed towards the Jews is called Anti-Semitism. In another example, the Nazi troops of Hitler also exterminated 4 million Gypsies in Europe. Unfortunately, widespread racism

against the Gypsies, who were originally Hindus from India, continues to this day in many European countries. In earlier centuries, the Europeans and Arabs indulged in large scale slave-trade and uprooted millions of Africans from their homelands and transported them to the Americas and to the Middle East (and even to the Indian subcontinent) to work as slaves who were ill-treated. In the Americas, racism was directed towards the Native Americans, and Christian priests even debated whether the natives of these newly discovered lands even had a soul. Millions of Native Americans perished due to ill-treatment and disease from the arrival of Europeans.

2. Religious Hatreds: Many religions, notably Judaism, Christianity and Islam believe that only the followers of their particular religion are favored by God and are His chosen people; and that everyone else is an infidel who can be humiliated, enslaved, taxed and slaughtered. This mindset has resulted in a very bloody history of these religions. In the case of Hindus and Buddhists, Islamic armies ruthlessly invaded our traditional homelands and slaughtered, enslaved, or forcibly converted millions of our forefathers because they believed that as 'idol-worshippers', we Hindus and Buddhists were evil people. Today, hatred directed against Hindus and Buddhists continues in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and many other Islamic countries and a continuous stream of Hindus and Buddhists continues to flee their traditional motherlands. In contrast, the Dharmic traditions of Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism have been relatively tolerant and free of religious hatred. There is no parallel in the history of Dharmic traditions anything close to the Protestant-Catholic civil wars, the Jihads of Muslim armies, the Crusades of Christians and so on. In extreme cases, this type of hatred results in the rise of terrorist groups like the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

However, there are other types of hatred too – like Islamophobia (in which people have an extreme dislike for Muslims and Islamic culture) and Hinduphobia (in which Hindus are blamed for every problem and Hindu Dharma is portrayed in negative terms in the media), parallel to but much more benign than Anti-Semitism.

It is not only people of different religions who can hate each other. Sometimes, people belong to different sects within the same religion can also hate each other. For example, Protestants and Catholics fought for several decades in Northern Ireland. The Shias and Sunnis have their own militia to fight each other in Pakistan.

3. Academic Hatreds: Contrary to what we would believe, it is not only the ignorant people who indulge in hatreds. Several scholars too indulge in hating others in a very subtle manner. These haters are actually more dangerous because they have the capability of influencing the masses, and generate many more hate-filled people.

4. Linguistic Hatreds: People can also hate others who speak a different language from theirs. E.g., Bengali speakers might hate Urdu speakers in Bangladesh.

5. Caste Hatreds: The Hindu society is divided into several castes and people of one caste or sub caste sometimes dislike or bear a prejudice against others. Luckily, these types of hatreds have hardly ever degenerated into mass-scale violence. But it has led to severe prejudices and discrimination directed towards the so called 'untouchables'. Hindu scriptures and saints have consistently rejected these types of hatreds and have exhorted that we should see the presence of Bhagavān within everyone's heart. In fact, Krishna clearly says that-

> The wise see the same (Brahman) with an equal eye, in a learned and humble brāhmaña, in a cow, in an elephant, in a dog, and even in a dog eater (outcast). **Gita 5.18**

6. Presumed or Real Moral Superiority: Sometimes we hate others because we assume (rightly or wrongly) that we are ethically or morally superior to them. E.g. hating pedophiles. Hindu Dharma teaches us that hatred in any form is wrong because it vitiates our own mind. In these cases, we should follow the advice of Bhagavān Buddha who said, "Hate sin, not the sinner."

7. Homophobia: Hatred for Gays and denial of equal rights to them.

There are many other kinds of hatreds but a detailed listing and treatment of them is beyond the scope of this book. **The point to be learned in this chapter that we must not have any kind of hatred that is directed towards any individual or group.**

Further Research:

1. Read the article "*Washington Post and Hinduphobia*" by Rajiv Malhotra at http://rivr.sulekha.com/washington-post-and-hinduphobia_103592_blog
2. Read the book "*Invading the Sacred*' Ed by Krishnan Ramaswamy and Aditi Banerjee (http://invadingthesacred.com/)
3. *"Hinduism: Not Cast in Caste*" by The Hindu American Foundation at http://www.hafsite.org/media/pr/hinduism-not-cast-caste-full-report

Prayer against Hatred:

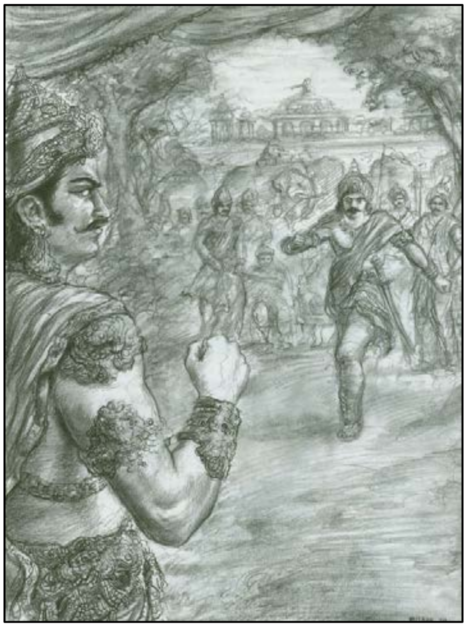
> Just as a boatman takes his passengers across a river, so many Bhagavān whose face is everywhere, take us beyond our hatreds. May our sins get washed away, just as water extinguishes fire. **Atharvaveda 4.33.7**

23. Fault Finding & Complaining

No one likes to be around people who are always complaining, whining and picking faults in others. If we are always close to these negative people, it starts affecting our own mind. We ourselves become prejudiced and pessimistic, instead of being a happy and a person. We ourselves should be open to our criticism so that we can improve ourselves. But if the critic is constantly criticizing us or others, then it is better to avoid his company.

23.1 Why do People Indulge in Back-biting and Fault-Finding?

1. **Because of their Ego,** which prevents them from appreciating anyone else other than their own self.



Story: Duryodhana cannot find a single person with good qualities

"Once, the great teacher of the Kaurava prices, Dronacharya, asked all his students to find a person endowed with all the best qualities, and also to find one who would be the worst, devoid of all qualities.

Duryodhana, the evil minded prince, proceeded first to find the one who was the best. But wherever he went, he found some evil in every person. There was no one, not even his parents, were free from defects. But when he thought about himself, he found himself to be the embodiment of all virtues.

So he came to Dronacharya and announced that he himself was the best in the world. All else had defects, and could not therefore, compare to him.

But Yudhishthira, on the other hand, the virtuous prince, the eldest brother of the Pandavas, came to this conclusion – that he alone was the worst in this world; though in fact, he was one of the best in his times. He found defects only in himself. This was due to his humility and sincerity.

Dronacharya was pleased with Yudhishthira. In the course of time, Yudhishthira came to be known as the embodiment of virtue. But Duryodhana proved himself to be the embodiment of vice.

The moral of the story is that to the evil-minded, the whole world is filled with evil. Therefore, see what is good, hear what is good, do what is good, and follow the example of Yudhishthira."[27]

The other reason why Duryodhana could not find a single virtuous person was that he was full of pride and ego. He was worried that calling someone else as a better person will lower his own status or esteem.

[27] Page 168 in Swami Jyotirmayananda (1976)

2. **Due to their Jealousy**: A jealous person can never tolerate any praise or success of his adversary and will constantly try to find some flaw in him that diminishes his achievement. For e.g., if his adversary wins a swimming race, he will say, "He won only because he had access to that same pool and belonged the country that hosted the swimming championship. If our country had hosted it, then he would have had no chance at all, and I would have won the race! In fact, I do not think he swam well at all."
3. **Hatred and Prejudice:** When we dislike someone or are biased against him, we tend to exaggerate their faults. If they have 2 faults, we see 5. And if they have 5 faults, then we count 10. For example, a white supremacist will never see anything good in a person of color.
4. **Because they are themselves imperfect or insecure**. Or because they are not mature, and cannot appreciate true greatness. A common man will never be able to appreciate or evaluate a flawless diamond. But a trained and a knowledgeable jeweler can look at an uncut diamond and immediately estimate how precious it is. Similarly, a person lacking wisdom or character will judge others by his own ignorant standards, whereas a saint will recognize the spiritual worth of another spiritually realized person when he sees him. The following parable of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa illustrates this well:

Story: A Thief, Drunkard or a Sage?

"Once a sage was lying by the roadside deeply immersed in Samadhi. A thief while passing by that way, saw him and thought: "This fellow here must be a thief. He must have broken into some houses last night, and is now sleeping through exhaustion. The police will be here soon to catch him. So let me escape in time." Thus cogitating he ran away. Soon after, a drunkard came there and seeing the sage, said: "Hello! You have fallen into the ditch by drinking too much! I am steadier than yourself and am not going to tumble down." Last of all there came a sage, and realizing that a great saint was lying in the state of Samadhi, sat down by his side and began to stroke his holy feet gently. Thus our worldly tendencies prevent us from recognizing true holiness and piety."[28]

23.2 How can we overcome the Habit of Fault-Finding?

1. **Self-Introspection:** Before we start criticizing the other person, we ought to reflect whether our negative opinions are being inspired by our hatred, jealousy, ego, prejudice or insecurity. Very often we will discover that our opinions lack true objectivity and are based on subjective stereotyping of others.

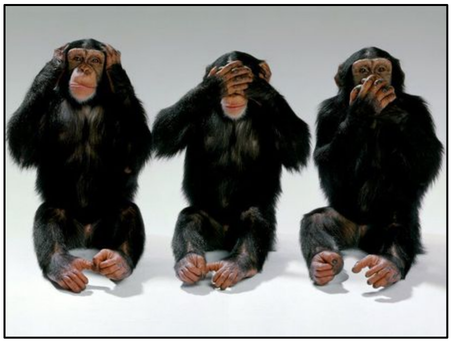
> The vicious and the mean observe other's faults, be they so little as the mustard seeds. They see but pretend not to see their own faults as big as bilva fruit. **Garuda Purāṇa 1.113.57**.

[28] Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna Math. Mylapore: Madras; pp. 235-236

2. **Improve Yourself:** Instead of judging the other person, we ought to look at ourselves in the mirror. We might find that the same faults that we see in others are instead present in us. Or even we do not have that flaw, we still have room to improve. So why not use energy to improve ourselves instead of finding faults in others?
3. **Look for Positive Qualities in Others:** Our focus should not be the flaws of others, but their good qualities and learn from them. Everyone has some good quality or the other. Negative thoughts make our own mind debased, whereas focusing on positives has a beneficial effect on us.

   Merely focusing on negatives of others is a reflection of our own pettiness and the degraded state of our mind.

> "The fly always sits on a festering sore on the body, ignoring the rest of the body that is beautiful." **Sanskrit proverb**
>
> "A crow dives to pick a single piece of trash even in a beautiful garden. It does not appreciate of the beds of flowers and other plants instead." **Sanskrit proverb**



Several spiritual sages have therefore asked us to behave like the three monkeys who hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil. Mahatma Gandhi used to keep a sculpture of these three monkeys in his room to remind him of this principle. Being indifferent to the flaws of others (except when we want to correct them) is beneficial for our own physical and mental health. This is why the Hindu scriptures say:

> Even a person who does not have any auspicious physical marks lives for a hundred years if he has a virtuous conduct, if he is imbued with faith and if he is not in the habit of picking faults in others. **Mahābhārata 13.104.13**

Story: Gautama Buddha appreciates the teeth of a Dog's Carcass

Once, Buddha and his disciples were walking through a forest, when they encountered a decaying carcass of a dog. It looked horrible, and it smelled really bad. Buddha's disciples gave a look of disgust and closed their noses with their fingers. But the Buddha went closer to the corpse and said, "Look, the dog had beautiful and shining white teeth." The disciples got the message which was that we should never dwell on the negatives of others. Instead, we should look for good things in others. When we focus on the bad things of others, our own mind becomes evil. And when we look for good things in them, our own mind becomes more wise, and pure.

4. **Practice the Virtue of 'Guṇagrāhitā'**, i.e., focusing on virtues of others and try to incorporate them in one's own behavior. In fact, a person who wants to improve himself will

always learn positive things from even things that are considered lowly, degraded or useless by others. Take what is good, and leave behind what is bad.

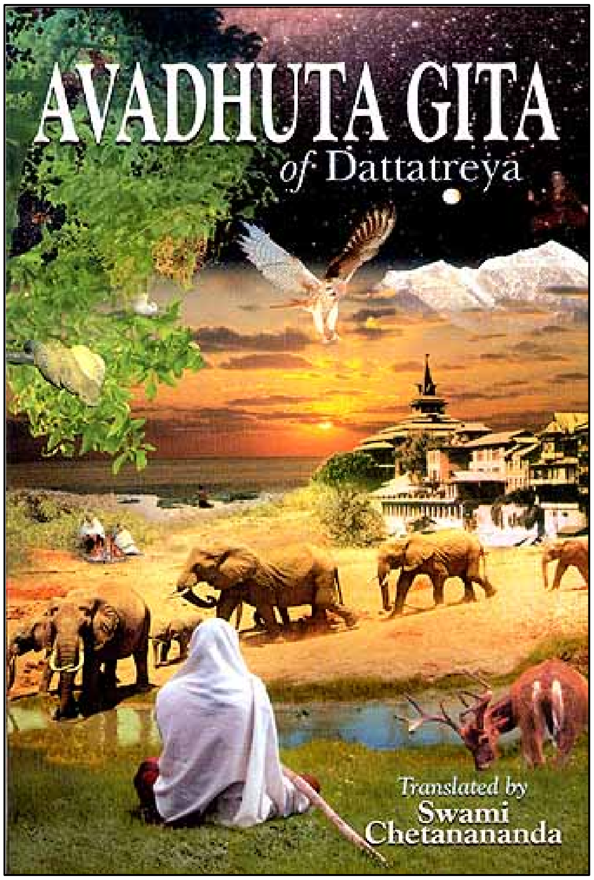
Story: Mahatma Gandhi responds to an Abusive Letter

Once, a critic of Mahatma Gandhi wrote him a very long letter. Mahatma Gandhi patiently read the letter carefully, going over page after page of abuse. He did not seem to get bothered at all by the nonsense written in that letter. After he completed reading it, it removed the paper clip holding the pages, and placed it inside his small box of stationary items for future use. Then he just crumpled the letter and threw the sheets in a recycle bin because they were of no use to him.

Story: Avadhūta learns good Lessons from Everyone:

The most effective way of overcoming the tendency to find faults in others is that whenever our mind looks at the flaws in someone, we should immediately try to look for good things in that person and learn from them. Everyone has some unique abilities, and we can learn something good from everyone. In this connection, there is a beautiful story of Bhagavān Dattātreya Avadhūta that is recorded in the Shrimad Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

One day, Emperor Yadu was passing through a forest when he saw Avadhūta seated with a joyous smile on his face. The Emperor asked Avadhūta, "What is the true source of your happiness?" Why do you look so happy all the time, when everyone in this world has some sorrow. Bhagavān Dattātreya replied, "I am always happy because my Ātman (soul) has taught me a lot of things, and because I have learned wisdom from 24 Gurus."



The Emperor was surprised, because it would have taken a long time to study under two dozen teachers. So he requested Bhagavān Dattātreya to name his teachers and summarize what he learned from them. But to the greater surprise of the Emperor, Bhagavān Dattātreya did not name any Rishi or scholar as his teacher. Instead, he gave him a list that comprised of the honey bee, the earth, water, wind, sky, moon, sun, pigeons, snake, fish, python and so on. He explained how everything surrounding us gives some profound teaching that we can practice every day in our lives.

For example, people stomp on the earth everyday but she bears their blows patiently and instead gives food grains, flowers and fruit to human beings. Likewise, we should just bear the abuses of others and always respond with kind words and gifts.

The honey bee collects the essence from numerous flowers and then mixes it to make nectar like honey. In the same way, we should learn good things from everyone and use this knowledge from several sources to produce something more valuable.

Numerous rivers fall into the ocean, but the ocean never overflows and stays calm in its interior. In the same way, not matter what difficulties befall us, we should always keep our heart and mind stable.

In this way, Bhagavān Dattātreya explained to him the lessons that he had learned from all of his 24 teachers, and these teachings are compiled in a scripture called the Avadhūta Gita which forms a part of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Emperor Yadu was very impressed by the central message of the Sage, which was that he who wants to learn and progress in the path of spirituality will always find a way to learn a good message from everything that he encounters. But that person who does not want to succeed will only dwell on the negatives of others.

5. **Practice the virtue of Kshānti, or Acceptance:** Who is perfect in this world accept Bhagavān? No one! Everyone does have some flaws. So what is the big achievement if we found a flaw in someone else?
6. **If it is Broke, Fix it, do not Twist it:** If we do find faults in others, or an error somewhere, then rather than indulging in teasing, criticism, condemnation etc., we should try to fix it. We should play a positive role and try to find solutions to problem. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Be the change that you wish to see in this world.” Those who are always complaining and criticizing themselves risk being sidelined and dumped as useless people by the society. In other words, if we are not a part of the solution, we become the precipitate.

24. Gossiping, Backbiting

24.1 The Difference between Gossiping and Back-biting

Many people cannot control themselves from carrying tales from one place to another. If they hear something scandalous at one location, they promptly go to another location and spread the tale of the scandal after adding their own flourish and imaginary details. People do not always gossip with an evil intention. It is just a bad habit that people indulging in without much thought, although

A particular form of gossiping is 'back-biting' in which we say only bad things about a second person or a situation to a third person, and with the evil intention of defaming, ridiculing, or bringing him down. An example is telling on a classmate of yours to the teacher with the intention of getting him scolded.

Eventually, gossip and back-biting catch up with the person who indulges in it, with the result that it is he (and not the person he spoke about) who gets a bad reputation. People try to be careful of a gossiper and a back-biter and he is kept at a distance in all important discussions. These bad habits just create a lot of conflict and misunderstandings and are therefore very bad Karma according to our scriptures -

> Gossipers, violators of noble traditions of one's family and Dharma, parasites who live off other people's money, and those who lack gratitude towards friends who have helped them – all of these definitely go to hell. **Mahābhārata 13.23.66**

24.2 How can we overcome the habit of Gossiping and Back-Biting

1. Try to discuss ideas or discuss yourself, not some third person.
2. If you bear a grudge against someone, do not gossip about him. Instead, go to him directly and get all your disputes or misunderstandings cleared first hand.

   > Bheeshma said – Only fake people criticize others or say bad things about them behind their backs. Genuine and truth persons always criticize others in front of saints. **Mahābhārata 12.132.13**

3. Put yourself in the place of others and ask yourself if you would feel happy were a third person to gossip about you.
4. Finally, learn to talk less and do not indulge in useless or long conversations. A very talkative person frequently gets carried away and unintentionally says things that he had not planned to. All this unplanned talk constitutes gossip and can lead to negative consequences.

24.3 Is Gossiping always Bad?

Gossiping is not always a bad thing. In the Hindu scriptures, we come across a great Sage Devarshi Narada, who was continuously on the road, carrying gossip and tales from one place to another. His gossip resulted in numerous conflicts and battles, but they always had a good result. Through his activities, he was always pitting evil people against Bhagavān as a result of which the former either got reformed or they were defeated by good forces. In fact, in the Hindu society, when we come across a person who is in the habit of carrying tales, we refer to them as 'Narada Muni'.

25. Stealing

25.1 Why do people Steal?

1. Due to Need or Greed: People steal because they are in need and have no other recourse to get food, clothing etc. However, many a times, people steal because they are greedy. For example, we often ready about rich individuals arrested for shop-lifting. The culprit could have purchased the same item with his own money (as he could have afforded it) but preferred to steal it because he thought he would not get caught, and because he really did not 'need' the item but wanted it nevertheless!

2. For the Thrill of it: Some people steal because they find it thrilling! An English proverb goes that 'stolen waters are sweet,' meaning that people cherish the same thing more if they get it by stealing rather than if they get it by hard work. Some people think that it is easier to just steal rather than work and earn it. Sometimes, teenagers steal things because they are 'dared' by their friends to do so, or because they want to impress their peers of their daredevilry. But doing this is foolish because if caught, the teenager can get into serious trouble, and then his friends whom he had wanted to impress would be nowhere around to help him. And they just do not realize that what they did for fun possibly caused a lot of harm and unhappiness to their victim of stealing, as well as to their parents who felt ashamed at the fact that their own children were involved in the unethical act.

3. Due to some Psychological Problems (Kleptomania): Some people are compulsive thieves due to a disorder called Kleptomania in which the person fees an uncontrollable urge to steal, and then feels relieved when he has committed the crime. The Kleptomaniac does not steal to fulfill his need or want, nor for thrill. He steals because he just cannot help it, and feels a mental pressure to do it. Kleptomaniacs can undergo medical treatment to get rid of their illness and deserve to be treated by the society with sympathy and compassion.

The opposite of stealing are honesty and truth, virtues about which we will learn more later.

25.2 Forms of stealing

In the modern society with the advance of technology, people are finding newer and newer ways of stealing in addition to the old ways. The conventional ways of stealing were burglary, banditry, robbery, theft, smuggling, corruption, taking bribes, cheating in business transactions, swindling, over-charging interest on loans etc. The modern and newer ways include insurance fraud, identity theft, stealing of passwords and email accounts, stealing social security and Medicare funds, not paying the required amount of taxes, stashing money overseas to avoid paying taxes in one's home-country, credit card fraud, plagiarism etc. **Can you name some other modern forms of stealing of which you should be careful of? How can you protect yourselves from these modern ways of stealing?**

25.3 Consequences of Stealing:

1. Karmic Consequences: The thief thinks that he is enriching himself by stealing. But our Rishis warn us that somewhere down the line, the bad Karma of thievery rebounds, and the thief loses that very thing that he steals, or suffers in a way that takes care of his original intent of stealing. For example, if a person steals a medical supplement to become healthy, then later in this life or the next, he will either get stuck by disease, or will be forced to give money to someone else who wants to buy health supplements.

2. Emotional Consequences: Stealing deprives the other person of something that truly belongs to him. In addition to the financial or material loss to the victim, he also suffers from an emotional loss. For example, if someone loses a prized medal that he won during the Olympics, not only does he lose the monetary value of the medal, but also feels upset that the symbol of recognition that he got for all of his hard work and his victory is gone.

3. Violence and Bloodshed: No one wants to get robbed and people will try to defend their property. Therefore, stealing can lead to disputes, often violent ones, in which the thief and the intended victim can get hurt and even get killed.

4. Loss of Societal and Governmental Resources: To prevent theft, the government is forced to spend considerable resources in policing, maintaining law courts, jails etc. In a neighborhood where theft is common, people live in fear and with a great sense of insecurity. They cannot leave their homes without locking it thoroughly, setting up their burglar alarm, hiding their valuables and so on. If only people were to stop stealing, it would save the society and the government from a lot of trouble.

5. Psychological Harm on the Society: Stealing has a profound psychological impact not just on the thief, but also on the victims as well as on third parties. A person who steals once loses a bit of a sense of guilt or shame in his mind. When he goes out to steal the next time, he will not feel as guilty stealing as he had felt the first time. And once he has committed a theft multiple times, he just becomes a remorseless and a hardened criminal. Likewise, losing all of one's possessions to burglary can have a great traumatic impact on the victim who may take several years to recover his losses. Sometimes, when people see a famous and a renowned person caught stealing, they lose faith in the laws, in government officials, in the goodness of human beings. And this reduces their own resolve to desist from evil actions like cheating others because they come to believe that everyone, even the people they trust, steal with impunity. The story below from Indian history shows one such incident, and how the great Hindu Queen Ahilyabai Holkar dealt with it.

Story: Queen Ahilyabai reforms her Dishonest Official

The noble queen Ahilyabai Holkar, a widow herself, opened a department in her government to ensure that the property and other rights of widows are protected. She also spent a lot of her kingdom's money to provide for poor and destitute widows. One day, she learned that the official who was in charge of taking care of the funds of that department was stealing money that was meant for the widows.

She summoned the official and took him on a boat ride to the middle of the Narmada river. Then, showing him the account books, she said to him, “Look, I know that you have manipulated the accounts so that no one catches you for stealing money meant for the poor widows. I want you to throw these account books into the river with your own hands. Then no one will have any proof that you are a thief because there will be no accounts to cross-check against the stolen money.”

The official broke down and asked her, “Your majesty, I confess that I have stolen money. Then why do you want to destroy the proof that you can use to prosecute me?” The Queen replied, “I do not want the poor widows to find it out, because if they do, then they will lose all faith in me. They will lose hope that the government is sincerely trying to good to them. This department of my government is the only source of their livelihood. And if they discover that even that is not reliable, they will not have reason to live.”

These words of the noble Queen really pierced the heart of the official and he turned over a new leaf. He decided that henceforth, he will be completely honest and will not steal any more money that was meant to provide for the poor widows.

25.4 When is Stealing permissible?

Stealing is not always a bad thing to do and Hindu scriptures allow it under certain circumstances. For example, if one is starving and has not had food for 3 days in a row, and yet no one is willing to give food in a charity, then the hungry person may steal food from somewhere. Poverty, hunger and starvation etc., are mitigating circumstances in this case. In the English tradition, we read about Robin Hood, who robbed from the rich to give to the poor. Do some research on him on the internet.

Below is a story of the great Sikh Emperor showing his generosity towards a lady who was trying to steal some fruit to feed her stomach.

Story: Maharaja Ranjit Singh gives Charity to a Thief

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the Sikh Emperor of Punjab from 1799 – 1839 CE. He was a very noble king, very fair and very generous towards the poor and the needy.

One day, he was sitting under a tree in his garden. Suddenly, a stone came from the other side of the tree and hit him.

His guards immediately ran to catch the culprit, who turned out to be a young lady. When she was asked as to why she had attacked the Maharaja with the stone, she started crying. She said, “Forgive me your majesty. I did not know that you or anyone else was sitting below this tree. I am a poor woman and have no money to buy food. So, I threw a stone at the tree, thinking that it will hit one of the mangoes and cause it to fall. I had hoped to eat that mango to fill my stomach.”

The Maharaja ordered the guards to release the woman, and then said, “Give her some money so that she can buy food.” The guards were surprised that the Maharaja gave money to the lady whose stone could have hurt him.

The king senses their puzzled looks and said, “If her stone had hit the right spot on the tree, the tree would have given her food for her lunch. Now, am I not better than this tree? If the tree can give her a mango on being hit, I should surely give her something more. She was a poor woman and she threw a stone at the tree to fight her hunger.”

Discussion:

You work for a company and are asked to go on a business trip to a different city. Your company rules for travel on business purposes say that you will be reimbursed for all your expenses during the trip. They also say that you do not have to give proof of your expenses that are below $25, and that you are allowed to spend up to $20 on each meal.

During the trip, you eat at a cheap fast food restaurant every day and for every meal, and at no meal is your bill is more than $5. But when you return to your office after the trip and fill out a form to claim money for your expenses during the trip, you enter between $15 and $20 for every meal.

Do you think this is stealing?

Section IV
ETHICAL VALUES FOR STUDENTS

26. Absence of Fear (Abhayam)

RELATED VIRTUES & SYNOYMNS: Bravery, Risk Taking, Sticking out One's Neck, Courage
OPPOSING QUALITIES: Cowardice, Timidity, Fearfulness

26.1 Why should we be Free of Fear?

1. When Krishna starts listing the 26 Divine Treasures of a virtuous human in the Bhagavad Gita (verse 16.1), he mentions 'absence of fear' as the first virtue. The reason for this is that a person who is always scared, who is timid and coward will never have the courage to practice all other values.
2. It is not always easy to practice Dharma. It might take a lot of courage, boldness and guts to take a decision that is correct, but hard to take. But one who is a coward will hesitate to take that step forward and take the correct decision. As a result, he will not move forward. In fact, he might go backwards!
3. A person who is timid or a coward will not have the courage to stand up for his own beliefs and ideals when the situation requires. If others ridicule him for practicing Dharma, he will not defend his behavior to others and would rather sulk, keep quiet, or even start following the path of Adharma to 'fit-in' with others. If we continue to live in fear, and are scared of every little thing, we are doing a great disservice to ourselves.
4. Whenever someone questions the beliefs or practices of a fearful person, he shies away due to timidity. He might show a smile on his face, but he will feel hurt, depressed and humiliated in his mind. We must not hurt others, but that does not mean that we do keep hurting ourselves due to the mistakes of others and our own fears and timidity.
5. A fearless person does not run away from his problems. He faces them boldly and overcomes them. A coward can never be a leader. If he sees any injustices in the society, he just accepts them meekly. But a brave person raises his voice and tries to fix social evils and injustices that he sees around him.

26.2 Giving the Gift of Fearlessness to Others:

Fearlessness also means that we should constantly avoid hating others, hurting others or feeling angry or jealous towards others so that the creatures around us are not afraid of us in any way.

> Granting the gift of fearlessness [such as from attack by bandits] is superior to all other gifts of charity. By doing so, the donor attains that world (or state) that he has desired. **Vishnu Dharma Sutra 92.1-2**
>
> He who grants protection to frightful creatures begets a long life and happiness, and all his mental desires are fulfilled. **Samvartta Smriti 53**

26.3 Why do we become Fearful? How can we Overcome Fear?

1. ***Abhinivesha (The Fear of Physical Harm or Death):*** Self-preservation is a basic trait of all living beings. No one wants to die, or to get harmed. Accordingly, the fear of death or injury is the major cause of fear in human beings. But Hindu Dharma teaches that what we call death is merely the destruction of our physical body. Our true essence, the soul, does not die and will never die. After the old body is destroyed during the death, the soul finds another body to inhabit and enliven. The three desires of a soul are immortality (of freedom from the death of its physical body), unrestricted awareness and infinite Joy. These are attained only in the state of Moksha. Spiritual practices like Meditation help a lot in overcoming this fear. Through meditation, we become aware of the fact that our true identity is indeed our Atmā and not this perishable body. We can see our distinction from the body through meditation, whereas in our day to day life, we tend to identify ourselves completely with our body.
2. ***The Fear of Financial Loss:*** The second cause of fear is that of losing our possessions or financial security. This fear can be overcome by thoroughly planning our lives so that the chances of loss are minimized. The second solution of this type of fear is to understand that possessions are never permanent. Money is like a rotating wheel that travels from one place to another. Change is a fact of life. If we are rich today, we may be poor tomorrow or vice versa. This understanding should make us become less attached to our material possessions, which can never be our constant companions. Instead, we should attach ourselves to something with which we have a permanent association and relationship – namely Bhagavān.
3. ***Fear of Infamy and Loss of Loved Ones:*** The third cause of fear is that of losing face in front of, or losing the companionship of our dear ones – be they family members of be they friends. Hindu Dharma teaches us that separation from our loved ones is a fact of life and is inevitable. We are all like logs of wood floating in the endless ocean of samsara (the world of birth and rebirths). For some period of time, we come in contact with a few other logs, our friends and relative, but then we drift apart. In the future, we will come in contact with the same logs again, and then drift apart again. This is the true nature of this world, a reality that we should not deny. The only constant friend or companion that we have is our Karma – good or bad deeds that do not depart from us with death. And the second eternal companion is of course Bhagavān. We should imbibe this truth of life in our minds thoroughly so that we are not perturbed too much by the thought of losing our dear ones. Why get worried about something that is bound to happen, and which we can never prevent? Does this mean that we have only a superficial relationship with others? No! It means that we use our life to treat others in a way that enhances the wisdom and knowledge of our Ātmās.
4. ***Fear from Guilt:*** The fourth cause of fear is caused by the guilt that we have not given others their due share. Life is like a giant web in which we are all interconnected. What we are today is not merely the results of our own efforts, but also a result of all that our parents, siblings, other elders, friends, the society in general and other people have done for us. We should not life like an isolated island, worrying only about our own welfare. We should spend considerable time and effort to do our duties towards others, and also do karma that benefit others. This will give us a peace of mind, and rid us of any guilt feelings later on in our lives.

26.4 Other ways of getting rid of Fear

1. ***Cultivate thoughts of Bravery and Courage:*** The Yoga Darshana teaches a technique – ‘pratipaksha bhāvanā’ or thinking the opposite. Most of our fears our imaginary and unreal. If we think thoughts that are of courage and bravery, we can counter the negative thoughts that keep coming in our mind. Secondly, we should analyze our fears rationally and determine which of those fears are imaginary and which ones are real. We will conclude that most of them have no basis in reality and are just a figment of our imagination.
2. ***Become a Spiritual Person:*** The doctrines of Vedanta and Bhakti also teach that we should constantly feel the presence of Bhagavān and also develop a deep faith, trust, love and a spirit of surrender for Bhagavān. Then, no matter what real dangers we face in our life, we will be able to battle them with full courage knowing well that Bhagavān is also wielding weapons for us to fight these dangers. Implicit faith in Bhagavān and a spirit of surrender unto Him help us in accepting any adverse turn of events as His will. Downturns in our lives do not break our spirit because we understand that it was Bhagavān’s will and that we must bear the difficult circumstances bravely till He gives us better times.

26.5 The Fearless Bhakta (Devotee) of Bhagavān

Taking Bhagavān as our personal Protector is in fact the best way to overcome the fears in our lives. Swami Sahajānanda Swāmīnārāyaṇ (1781 – 1830 CE) had taught that these four types of devotees of Bhagavān never experience any fear including that of death:

1. ***The Believer:*** He who has utmost faith in Bhagavān does not fear even death because he takes everything that happens to him as a gift of Bhagavān.
2. ***The Enlightened:*** This person understands the true eternal nature of the soul and knows that death affects only his body, not his soul.
3. ***The Brave:*** This type of person is not easily intimated by threats, and stays firm on the path of Dharma and devotion to Bhagavān no matter what. Therefore, he does not fear even death.
4. ***The Loving Devotee:*** The person who is totally engrossed in his love towards Bhagavān has no time to get distracted by fears and threats. Therefore, a loving devotee of Bhagavān does not fear even death.

26.6 Is all Fear Bad? Distinguishing between Bravery and Foolhardiness:

All fear is not bad. There is a distinction between fearlessness and fool-hardiness. A fool-hardy person is not afraid of genuine dangers, and therefore advances like a fool towards avoidable dangers. As a result, he lands up harming himself unnecessarily. To save ourselves from being a fool-hardy person, we should follow these steps:

1. Determine if the fear is genuine or real by looking at the situation. For example, if a lion is inside a steel cage that is locked, then we should not fear it. But if the lion is out in the open a short distance from you, then there is a genuine cause to fear it!

2. Channel your fear to protect yourself: A fool-hardy person does not recognize a danger when he is faced with it. Due to this, his body does not respond to the danger as it should, by boosting the release of adrenaline, increased blood flow to the legs (so that you can run away) etc.
3. Direct your fear to acquire a faith in Bhagavān: We all fear death, loss of possessions and so on. Instead of just fearing these things, our fears should motivate us to make an effort towards learning about Bhagavān and develop a relationship with Him.

Practicing Fearlessness – Examples from the Hindu Traditions

Being a fearless person does not necessarily mean that we just pick up a gun and fight our enemies. Fighting a battle or a war of course requires fearlessness. But more than that, we can exhibit this quality in our day to day lives in many different ways.

Story: THE SACRIFICE OF GURU TEGH BAHADUR:

Emperor Aurangzeb, who ruled India from 1658 – 1707 CE was a very fanatical Muslim ruler. He destroyed several temples of Hindus, dismissed his Hindu employees and underpaid them, denied promotion to them, imposed several special taxes on the non-Muslims, and also banned the celebration of Hindu festivals and other religious ceremonies. In the year 1765, he also issued orders to burn Hindu scriptures in several cities to stop all types of traditional Hindu education. The Emperor decided that in order to convert all Hindus to Islam, it was very important to first convert the Brahmanas, who were their religious leaders.

And therefore, he ordered his Governors to capture the Brahmanas, snap the sacred thread that they wore around their right shoulders and coerce them to convert. The persecution of Hindus was especially very severe in Kashmir. A group of Kashmiri Hindus went to the Amarnath cave shrine of Shiva, and prayed to him to protect their religion. Shiva appeared in a dream to Pandit Kriparam Dutt, their leader, and asked him to seek the help of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the 9th Guru of the Sikh community.

The Pandits of Kashmir appealed to Guru Tegh Bahadur to help them. He asked them to convey the following message to Aurangzeb, “If you succeed in converting me to Islam, then all the Hindus of Kashmir will also do so. But if you fail to make me a Muslim, then you will not force Kashmir’s Hindus to convert either.” Aurangzeb accepted. Guru Tegh Bahadur left for Delhi to see the Emperor with his three disciples, who were willing to risk their lives as well.

At Delhi, the Guru and his disciples were immediately imprisoned. The Muslim Qazi (magistrate) asked the Guru to either convert to Islam, or face death. When the Guru did not relent, they started torturing

his three disciples and killed them one by one in front of the eyes of the Guru. The first disciple was sawed into two pieces alive. The second was boiled to death in an oil cauldron. The third was wrapped in a bale of cotton and was burnt to death. The Guru was deeply pained but refused to convert to Islam. The Emperor asked the Guru to show a miracle if he wanted to save his life. But the Guru refused, saying that it he cannot disobey God's rules by showing miracles.

It was ordered that the Guru would be beheaded if he did not convert. But the brave Guru agreed to face death rather than give up his religion. The site where he was beheaded is today a Sikh shrine in Delhi. The great sacrifice of the Guru was possible because the Guru valued his religion more than his life, and was willing to stand up for his principles as a brave man, and as a spiritual person who believed in the eternality of the soul. His is an example of a true devotee of Bhagavān who accepted his murder as the will of Bhagavān, and therefore did not forsake his principles.

The sacrifice of the Guru did not go in vain. His son, Guru Gobind Singh, raised an army of Sikhs within a few decades. And within less than a century, the Sikh warriors freed large parts of the region of Punjab in India from the Islamic rule.

Story: The Bravery of Unniyarchaa

In the early 17th cent. CE., there lived a fencing and martial arts master named Aromal Chekavar. He trained his sister Unniyarcha also in sword-fighting. Unfortunately, she got married to a coward named Kunnhiraman.

One day, Unniyarcha expressed a wish to offer worship at a nearby Mandir of Bhagavān Ayappa. But her mother in law refused permission saying, "The path to the Mandir is dangerous. Often, members of the Chonaka tribe attack pilgrims and carry away their women as prisoners." But Unniyarcha would not be daunted. With a sword in her hand, she proceeded to the Mandir, taking her husband. On the way, the Chonaka tribesmen attacked the group, but Unniyarcha unsheathed her sword and valiantly killed her attackers. When the Chonaka chief heard about his men being killed by a woman, he too rushed to fight her. But, he soon realized that it was none other than the sister of his own martial arts Guru Aromal.

He appealed to Unniyarcha to sheath her sword and pardon him. But Unniyarcha was in no mood to forgive him till he gave a promise that henceforth, no member of his tribe would attach pilgrim women on their way to the Mandir. Because of Unniyarcha's bravery, many women were saved from kidnapping in the years that followed, and a ballad was written in Malayalam language in her honor. In modern times, even a movie has been made to depict the life of this brave heroine and plays are enacted to depict her bravery and fearlessness.

Story: The Sacrifice of Scholar Sudarshana Sūrī and the Temple Dancer

Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq, the Sultan of Delhi, deputed his eldest son Ulugh Khan to invade the Hindu kingdoms of South India in 1321 C.E. When the Muslim army of Ulugh Khan was close to the Srirangam temple, a festival was being conducted. When the invaders reached a place called Samayapuram, a senior official of the temple, decided that no time was to be lost. He commanded the 12000 ascetics who had gathered there not to disperse and instead form a human wall to stop the army. Then, he locked the doors of the main worship chamber, barred the doorways of the shrines of both Lord Ranganayaka and Devi Ranganayika, and placed pseudo images outside. One of the ascetics was the noted scholar Sri Sudarshana Suri. Just before the army was about to reach the temple, he called his student Vedanta Deshika and said, "I am handing over the manuscript of my greatest work Srutaprakāshikā and my two little sons to you. Protect them from the invaders.

The invading army desecrated the shrine, killed all the 12000 ascetics, including the great scholar Sri Sundarsana Bhatta. Vedanta Desika, hid himself amongst the corpses together with the sole manuscript of the Srutaprakāshikā and also the latter's two sons. When the massacre was over, they fled to Satyamangalam in Mysore, where Sri Vedanta Desika got several copies made of the manuscript of the Srutaprakāshikā. Due to the sacrifice and bravery of Sudarshana Suri and Vedanta Deshika, we still have that marvelous work of Hindu spiritual philosophy of Vedanta.

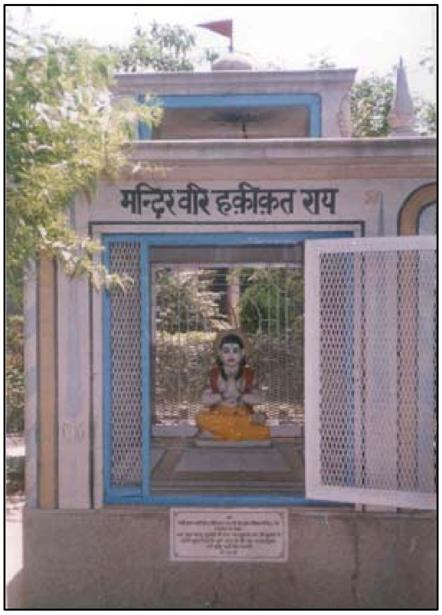
The Muslim army occupied the temple precincts and put and an end to Hindu worship. A temple courtesan, who fascinated the invading general, prevailed upon him not to destroy the temple altogether, and restrict his vandalism to the destruction of a few cornices. The Brahmins in the surrounding areas tried to perform the sacred rituals whenever they could, but were harassed by the occupying Muslim forces constantly. Unable to bear the harassment of the devotees by the Muslims, she enticed the Muslim chief, took him up a temple tower in the east, and in the pretext of showing him

a famous Mūrti from there, she pushed him down and killed him. Scared that she will be tortured by the Muslims as a result of her deed, she threw herself also down. According to tradition, to honor her memory, the funeral pyres of temple courtesans are lit by fire brought from the temple kitchen. In 1371 C.E., the newly founded Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar wrested back Srirangam from Muslim control, but it was the bravery of the courtesan and the 12,000 defenseless ascetics that saved the Mandir from total destruction.

Story: Teenager Hakikat Rai Puri Gives up His Life for is Dharma

In the early 17th cent CE in the city of Sialkot (now in Pakistan), a teenager boy Hakikat Rai was playing with his Muslim friends. Suddenly, a friend began to taunt him over his Hindu faith, and ridiculed the Devi. Hakikat Rai warned him not to say another abusive word against the Devi, but his friend persisted.

Hakikat Rai became angry, and he too counter-abused his friend by making an abusive comment against the daughter of Prophet Muhammad. The word of this incident reached the years of the Qazi (the Muslim magistrate) of Sialkot. Hakikat Rai was summoned to Lahore and upon confessing his crime, he was given the choice of conversion to Islam or death by the governor of the province. Hakikat Rai's parents rushed to the scene and they begged with their teenaged boy to convert to Islam. They reminded him that he had been married recently and they did not want to see his wife widowed. But Hakikat Rai refused to convert, and as a result, he was executed on the day of Basant Panchami festival.



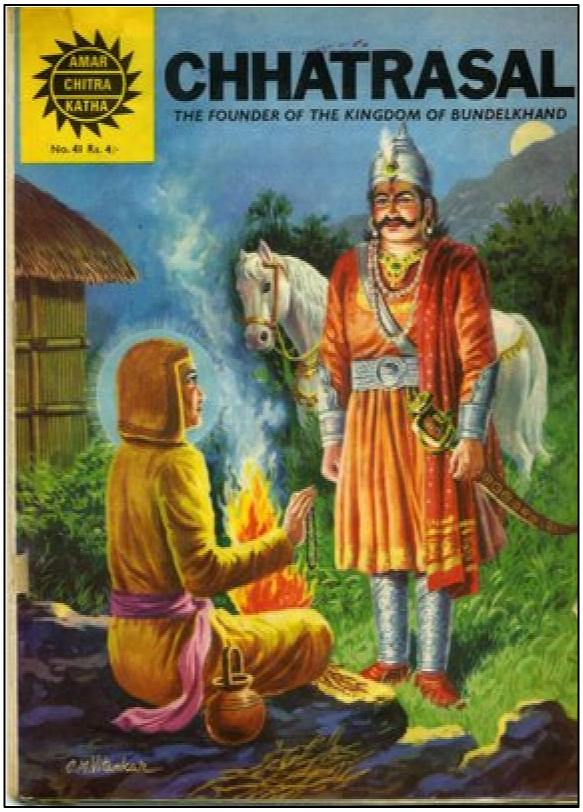
This incident caused a great consternation among the Hindus of the region. A Samadhi (mausoleum) was constructed in his memory at the site of his funeral. The Hindus of Lahore started the annual kite-flying festival in his memory on the day of the Basant Panchami festival. The festival caught on and became very popular. An annual fair began to be organized on the day of the festival in the memory of the brave Hindu boy who gave up his life but not his religion.

Today, even though there are no Hindus left in Lahore, the festival of kite flying on Basant Panchami is still celebrated. However, the local Muslims no longer pay homage to the Samadhi of Rai. His wife died several years later and was cremated at Batala, a city that is now in India. Today, a shrine has been constructed at her Samadhi in the memory of Hakikat Rai.

Story: The bravery of the Princesses of Sindh:

In the year 711-712 CE, the Arab general Muhammad bin Qasim invaded the Hindu kingdom of Sindh ruled by King Dahir. In a battle, Dahir was killed and his daughters were captured. Qasim sent the daughters to his Arab King in Baghdad as a gift.

The daughters wanted to avenge the death of their father. Therefore, they told the Arab King that they had already been abused by Qasim, and were therefore not worthy of him. The Arab ruler believed them and recalled Qasim to Baghdad for this insult. He had Qasim executed. Later on, he learned that the Princesses had lied to get revenge for their father's death, but it was too late. He had them dragged on the streets by horses, till the two Princesses died.



Story: Chhatrasāl shows signs of Bravery in his Teenage Years

Prince Chhatrasal: Chhatrasal (1649 – 1720 CE) is considered as the founder of the Hindu kingdom of Bundelkhand during the reign of the bigoted Muslim ruler Aurangzeb. His kingdom provided one more refuge for non-Muslims in India, and led to the construction of numerous beautiful temples, revival of Hindu religious learning and patronage of Hindu saints. Amazingly, Chhatrasal started his revolt at the age of 22 with the help of just 5 horsemen and 25 soldiers!

Chhatrasal was the son of a Hindu chief Raja Champat Rai and Lal Kunwar. He showed great signs of bravery even as a teenager. Once, his entire family were on their way to the Vindhyāvāsinī Devī temple in central India. The 13 year old Chhatrasal was ahead of his family. When he reached fairly close to the Mandir, he met several Muslim Pathans, who asked him for the location of the Mandir.

Chhatrasal asked, "Have you come to get a Darshan of the Devi?" The Pathans laughed, "What a fool! We have come to destroy the temple and break the Mūrti worshipped by you Hindus." Chhatrasal became very angry and challenged them to a fight. The Pathans mocked him saying, "You are but a teenager. Better scamper off and save your life."

But Chhatrasal could not be scared of. A sword fight ensued, and the 13 year old Chhatrasal single handedly killed all the Pathans. His act of bravery saved the Hindu mandir from destruction. When Chhatrasal grew up, he decided to stop Aurangzeb's policy of religious persecution of Hindus. Guided by his spiritual Guru Swami Pran Nath, he created the kingdom of Bundelkhand in which Hindus could heave a sigh of relief.

Story: Why India lost to Iran

In the year 1738, Nadir Shah, the cruel Emperor of Iran invaded India. After his armies occupied Delhi, the capital of the Moghul Empire, some residents of Delhi killed a few Iranian soldiers. Nadir Shah was enraged, and he ordered his troops to slaughter the residents of the city. For a whole day, the Iranian soldiers combed one house after the other, and slaughtered the innocent residents.

The Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah Rangila was terrified to see the slaughter of his citizens, and he appealed to Nadir Shah to relent and stop his soldiers from killing innocent people. Nadir Shah placed several conditions for peace. A traitor in the Mughal court had told Nadir Shah that the Mughal Emperor had hid the Koh-i-Noor in his royal turban. When Nadir Shah met the Mughal Emperor, he suggested that the two kings should exchange turbans as a mark of future friendship. The Mughal Emperor was in a fix, but he could not refuse. And so went the largest diamond in the world (at that time) to the Iranian Emperor.

Another of these conditions was especially humiliating – he asked the Mughal Emperor to send women from his family into the camp of Nadir Shah during night time. The Emperor had no choice but to accept this demand as well.

When the Mughal ladies entered the tent of Nadir Shah, the Iranian Emperor was sleeping in his bed with his sword hanging behind his back and from his waist. For several hours, the Mughal ladies stood there, shivering with fear. At last, Nadir Shah woke up. When he saw the Mughal ladies shivering with fright, he laughed and said – "You kept standing for several hours behind my back and I did not know of it because I was fast asleep. And yet, none of you had the guts to grab the sword from my waist and kill me. You are all cowards. No wonder, when the women of this country are so timid, they can hardly raise children who are brave and strong. This is why your country lost the battle to my troops."

Story: Swami Vivekananda Fights off Dangerous Monkeys

> "Once Swami Vivekananda, as an itinerant monk happened to pass through some lonely forest near the city of Banaras. He suddenly found himself surrounded by a large band of monkeys. Not having even a staff in his hand to scare the monkeys away, he could think of no means of escaping from the monkeys except to run away. As he began to run, the monkeys also in their hundreds began to run after him. The Swami felt exhausted and helpless, when he suddenly heard the words, "Flee not but face the trouble. Face it and it will flee from you." He stopped running at once and turning back faced the monkeys, when all of them appeared to get nonplussed, and then they started running away."[29]

This episode from the life of the Swami teaches us that **we should not run away scared from our problems like a coward. Instead, we should face them and overcome them.**

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[29] Swami Sambuddhananda, p. 34

Story: Swami Sahajananda's Fights the Evil Custom of Female Infanticide

Swami Sahajanand staunchly opposed the practice of female infanticide practiced by some communities like the Rajputs in Gujarat. The custom was called 'dudh piti' (drowned in milk). A considerable expense was involved in the marriage of girls, due to which several families killed their new born daughters by drowning them in a pitcher of milk.

Swami Sahajanand preached that killing of innocent daughters involved a three-fold sin. First, it was the murder of an innocent family member. Second, it was the murder of a child. And third, it was the murder of a helpless woman.

But, the communities objected to Swami Sahajanand's criticism of the custom and explained to him the difficulties in incurring the wedding expenses and so on. Swami Sahajanand retorted, "This does not mean that you kill your own daughters. If you do not have enough money for marrying off your girls, the community can get together and collect the required amount." But the members of these communities further argued, "There are very few good grooms available. Why should we marry our daughters to boys who have bad habits?" Swami Sahajanand rejected all these arguments and said, "My community of followers will take care to marry off your daughters to good men."[30]

He also rallied against the practice of Sati and forbade any man to instigate a widow to commit suicide. He preached that the human body was an invaluable gift from God and should be used for working our way towards Moksha. Howsoever virtuous her late husband may have been, the widow should not commit Sati. And anyone who induces or forces a woman to commit Sati is a murderer of women.[31]

Swami Sahajanand risked making enemies of powerful communities of people in his area. But he truly believed that female infanticide and Sati were evil customs. Therefore, he was willing to stick out his neck to oppose them without any fear. But not only did show bravery, he also showed a lot of practical wisdom in making arrangements so that people could actually follow his ideals. This story shows that a good leader is not only brave, he is also very practical minded and makes it easy for people to follow his ideals.

Story: Sage Dandamis is not Intimidated by Emperor Alexander's Threats

The following is an excerpt from J.W. McCrindle's translation of Greek historians who accompanied Alexander to India.

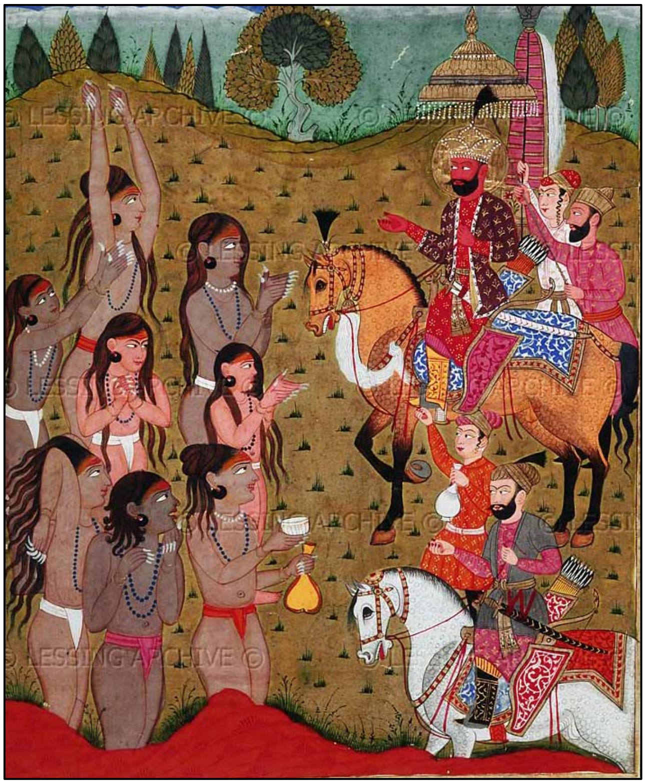
[30] Dave, pages 43-45
[31] Dave, pp. 45-47

“They (the Brahmanas) subsist upon such fruits as they can find, and on wild herbs, which the earth spontaneously produces, and drink only water. They wander about in the woods, and sleep at night on pallets of the leaves of trees…….

King Alexander, accordingly, when he heard of all this, was desirous of learning the doctrines of the sect, and so he sent for this Dandamis, as being their teacher and president. Onesikratês was therefore dispatched to fetch him, and when he found the great sage, he said, “Hail to thee, thou teacher of the Bragmanes. The son of the mighty god Zeus, king Alexander, who is the sovereign lord of all men, asks you to go to him, and if you comply, he will reward you with great and splendid gifts, but if you refuse will cut off your head.”

Dandamis, with a complacent smile, heard him to the end, but did not so much as lift up his head from his couch of leaves, and while still retaining his recumbent attitude returned this scornful answer:—

“God, the supreme king, is never the author of insolent wrong, but is the creator of light, of peace, of life, of water, of the body of man, and of souls, and these he receives when death sets them free, being in no way subject to evil desire. He alone is the god of my homage, who abhors slaughter and instigates no wars.



“But Alexander is not God, since he must taste of death, and how can such as he be the world’s master, who has not yet reached the further shore of the river Tiberoboas, and has not yet seated himself on a throne of universal dominion? Moreover, Alexander has neither as yet entered living into Hades, nor does he know the course of the sun through the central regions of the earth, while the nations on its boundaries have not so much as heard his name.

“If his present dominions are not capacious enough for his desire, let him cross the Ganges river, and he will find a region able to sustain men if the country on our side be too narrow to hold him.

“Know this, however, that what Alexander offers me, and the gifts he promises, are all things to me utterly useless; but the things which I prize, and find of real use and worth, are these leaves which are my house, these blooming plants which supply me with dainty food, and the water which is my drink, while all other possessions and things, which are amassed with anxious care, are wont to prove ruinous to those who amass them, and cause only sorrow and vexation, with which every poor mortal is fully fraught. But as for me, I lie upon the forest leaves, and, having nothing which requires guarding, close my eyes in tranquil slumber; whereas had I gold to

guard, that would banish sleep. The earth supplies me with everything, even as a mother her child with milk. I go wherever I please, and there are no cares with which I am forced to cumber myself, against my will.

“Should Alexander cut off my head, he cannot also destroy my soul. My head alone, now silent, will remain, but the soul will go away to its Master, leaving the body like a torn garment upon the earth, whence also it was taken. I then, becoming spirit, shall ascend to my God, who enclosed us in flesh, and left us upon the earth to prove whether when here below we shall prove obedient to his ordinances, and who also will require of us, when we depart hence to his presence, an account of our life, since he is judge of all proud wrong-doing; for the groans of the oppressed become the punishments of the oppressors.

“Let Alexander, then terrify with these threats those who wish for gold and for wealth, and who dread death, for against us these weapons are both alike powerless, since the Brahmanas neither love gold nor fear death. Go, then, and tell Alexander this: ‘Dandamis has no need of aught that is yours, and therefore will not go to you, but if you want anything from Dandamis come you to him.’ ”

Alexander, on receiving from Onesikratês a report of the interview, felt a stronger desire than ever to see Dandamis, who, though old and naked, was the only antagonist in whom he, the conqueror of many nations, had found more than his match.”[32]

26.7 Vedic Prayers for Fearlessness:

Free us Indra, from the fear of all that we are afraid of,
May Thou, with thy saving power,
Turn away the hater and the enemy. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhitā) 19.15.1**
We beseech Indra, the bounteous Giver,
We will be prosperous on men and cattle.
Let not the evil powers approach us;
Turn the hostiles who surround us, away. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhitā) 19.15.2**
Adorable Indra, our Savior,
The slayer of Vritra, fulfiller of our highest ambitions;
May he be our protector from yonder,
From the middle, from behind and from the front. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhitā) 19.15.3**
Lead us to a free world, Wise One!
Where lie the divine luster, sunlight and security.
Valiant are Thy arms of Thee, the Almighty,

[32] J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, Calcutta, Bombay, and London, 1877, online at lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2004/20040416001in/20040416001in.pdf as of 18 March 2008, p. 123–126.

And we seek shelter in them. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhitā) 19.15.4**
May the mid regions free us from all fear,
And both the Heaven and Earth make us secure.
Let there be for us, no fear from the west,
No fear from the east, no fear from the north and no fear from the south.
Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhitā) 19.15.5
Let there be no fear from friend, no fear from foe,
No fear from the known, no fear from that which lies before us unkown.
Let there be no fear for us from night, no fear from day,
May all the directions be my friends! **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhitā) 19.15.6**

Further Research:

Read about the lives of brave Hindu heroes like Chhatrapati Shivaji, Maharana Pratap, Velu Thampi, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Rani Durgavati etc.

27. Ahimsā (Not Hurting others)

27.1 What is Ahimsā?

Ahimsa means not thinking evil of others, not saying anything hurting to others, and not hurting or harming others physically. Ahimsa also means that we treat everyone with love, compassion, sympathy and understanding. In many ways, Ahimsa is the core principle of Dharma, according to Hindu scriptures-

> "Of the moral restraints, Ahimsa means not causing pain to any living creature in any way at any time. All other moral restraints (Truth, Non-Stealing etc.) originate from Ahimsa, and merely follow it. All other moral restraints are meant to achieve Ahimsa. Their teaching in the scriptures is meant merely to shed light on the nature of Ahimsa, and make its nature clearer." ***Yoga Bhashya 2.30***
>
> "Ahimsa and other moral restraints should not be constrained by considerations of life-form (e.g., 'I will kill only fish), place (e.g. 'I will not kill in holy places'), circumstance (e.g. 'I will kill only for the sake of gods and not for anything else')." ***Yoga Bhashya 2.31***
>
> Sage Kaushika said – The established rule is that a deed which involves no violence is indeed Dharma. Great sages have expounded the details of excellent Dharma for preventing violence against other living beings. **Mahābhārata Karna Parva 69.57**

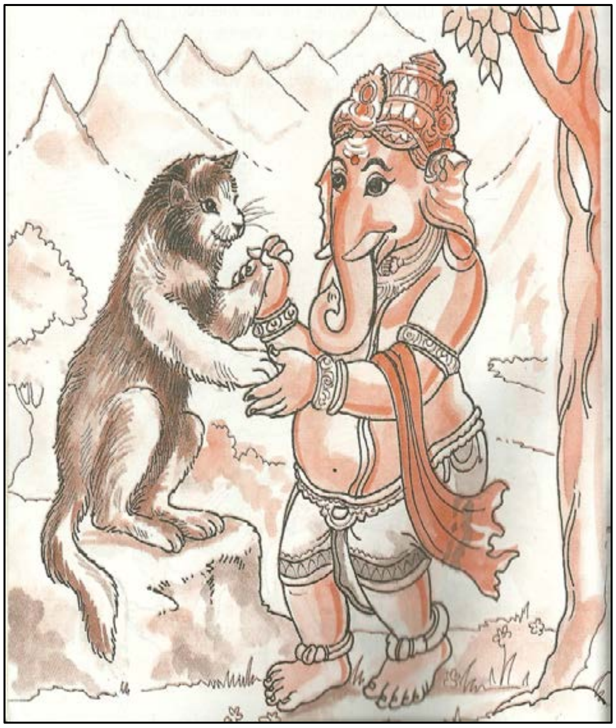
27.2 Why should we practice Ahimsa?

The Mahabharata gives the following reasons -

> Bheeshma said – There is nothing more precious in this world than one's own life. Therefore, just as we expect others to be kind towards us, so also we too should be kind towards everyone else. **Mahābhārata 13.116.8**
>
> Sage Brihaspati said – He who gets joy in beating non-violent (docile) animals with a stick will never get happiness in the next world. **Mahābhārata 13.113.5**

In short, we should practice this virtue because we too do not want others to hurt us, and because hurting others will eventually recoil on us and cause us unhappiness.

The third reason for practicing Ahimsā is that Bhagavān resides within every creature. Therefore, when we love someone, we automatically love Bhagavān, and when we hate and hurt others, we do the same to Him. As stated above, Hindus believe Ahimsā to be source of all other ideals. Therefore, no one can claim to be virtuous, charitable, truthful etc., if he or she does not practice Ahimsā.



Story: How Ganesha hurt His Mother Parvati

It was a bright sunny day on Kailash mountain. Ganesha went out to play. He enjoyed looking at the butterflies, and listened to the singing of birds. Suddenly, a cat walked to him.

Ganesha was very pleased. He thought, “Let me become the cat’s teacher today.” So he held the two front paws of the cat, and started dancing with it. After some time, Ganesha said, “Now I will release your paws. I want you to continue standing on your two legs and dance with me.” But as soon as he released the cat’s paws, it would sit down on all its four legs!

Ganesha tried to make the cat dance on its two legs on its own many times. But the cat just could not do it. Now Ganesha became upset and said, “You are not being a good student. You will get some punishment for this.” In anger, he scratched the face of the cat. The cat got scared, and ran away immediately.

It was lunch time. Ganesha went back to his home and asked his mother Parvati, “Ma, is lunch ready? I am hungry.” Parvati replied, “Yes, food is ready, but let me put some bandage on my wounds first.” Ganesha grew worried. He rushed in and said, “Who is it that scratched you so badly on your face?” Pārvatī replied, “It was you of course!”

“You must be joking Ma! How is that possible? I was playing out all the time. Someone else must have come in my place and pretended to be me. That person must have scratched your face.”

Parvati replied, “My son Ganesha, try to remember if you scratched anyone today?” Ganesha became a little shy and said, “Yes, but it was a cat. What does the cat have to do with your scratches?” Parvati said, “My son, I am the Mother of the whole Universe. I live in every creature, whether it is a plant, an animal or a human being. Therefore, whenever you hurt anyone else, you actually hurt me.”

Ganesha learned his lesson. He realized that if we love others, we love Bhagavan. And if we hurt others, we are hurting Bhagavan. So, he promised to his Mother, "I promise that from today onwards, I will never hurt others. I will never think bad about others. And I will never say bad things to others. I will always practice Ahimsa."

Parvati smiled and said, "You are right my son. The best way to make Bhagavan happy is to practice Ahimsa towards all creatures, because Bhagavan lives inside everyone's heart."

This story gives the third reason for practicing Ahimsā – it is the best way by which we can express our own love towards Bhagavān.

27.3 Towards who should we practice Ahimsā?

Hindu Dharma says that we should love not just our family, friends, neighbors, and other we that we know. We should extend our love to complete strangers, because the whole world is one big family.

> "If, Lord Varuna ('Holy One') we have sinned against the man who loves us,
> Or against a friend, Or against a comrade ever, or a brother;
> Or against a neighbor who is always with us;
> Or against a stranger – Then from that sin may You release us." ***Rigveda 5.85.7***
>
> "These are mine own, these are not my people –
> Such are the thoughts of lowly people.
> For them who have a generous and a large heart,
> The entire world is one great family!" ***Mahopanishad, chapter 3***

In fact, Hindu Dharma is unique in stating that Ahimsā should be practiced towards not just humans, but towards all living creatures which includes animals and plants.

> Sage Brihaspati said – He who gets joy in beating non-violent (docile) animals with a stick will never get happiness in the next world. **Mahābhārata 13.113.5**

27.4 Are there any Circumstances where Violence is Permissible?

Although Ahimsā is a universal principle, there are cases where violence becomes necessary. See the section on 'Shānti' to read more on this topic.

27.5 The Harms of Excessive Practice of Ahimsā

Although Ahimsā is a universal principle, we cannot afford to be sitting ducks when others completely run over us, as in the case of being bullied in school. This story of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa shows how we should practice this virtue wisely, so that our practice of Ahimsā does not make us a victim of the violence committed against us by them.

Story: The Snake that Stopped Biting

Below a shady tree in a village lived a venomous cobra in a hole in the ground. Every villager was scared to approach that tree, because the cobra would attack suddenly and bite whoever came close to him. Any person who had been bitten by the cobra would invariably die of the snake's venom.

One day, a Sadhu came to the village. Looking at the tree, he commented, "Aha, that is a nice and a shady tree. It is a good place for me to go and meditate." The villagers immediately warned him saying, "Swamiji, please do not approach that tree. Otherwise, the snake that lives in its roots will bite you to death."

The Sadhu said, 'Do not worry. I know a Mantra which will pacify the snake. Then, I will teach him the virtue of Ahimsa." Saying this, as the Sadhu approached the tree, the snake immediately slithered out of its hole to attack him. The Sadhu chanted the mantra, which caused the snake to become calm immediately. The snake now lay in the feet of the Sadhu quietly, looking at him with a loving eye. The Sadhu said to the snake, "Look here my son! Biting and killing others is against the virtue of Ahimsā. Why do you want to keep killing others out of anger? I will teach you a prayer, and you should chant it every day. This way, your mind will become peaceful and you will start practicing Ahimsā. Then, you would not want to bite and kill anyone. You can then feed your stomach by eating fallen fruit and leaves." Saying this, he taught the prayer to the snake. Then, he took leave of the snake saying, "I will leave this village now because Sadhus should not stay at any single place for a more than a 3 days. I will however return in a year, and I will check if you have made any progress on the path of Ahimsā.

The Sadhu now went back to the village and told the villagers that the snake will not bite anyone henceforth. No one believed him till a curious child approached the snake to verify the Sadhu's claim. He was surprised to see that the snake indeed did not bite him! The snake started chanting the Sadhu's mantra every day and his mind became more and more inclined towards Ahimsā. He changed his diet and allowed children to play underneath a tree. One day, a mischievous child threw a stone at the snake saying, "A snake can never be trusted. Look, I am going to injure it." The snake bled but he did not strike back. His injuries healed, but this attach on him by stones became a periodic affair. One day, a villager came to the snake and picked it by its tail. He started boasting, "Look, I will start swinging the snake round and round, and it will not have the guts to bite me!" He swung the snake fast till the snake fainted. The adult then thrashed the snake on the ground, till its bones broke.

It took several months for the snake's injuries to heal and it had grown very weak. A year had passed in the meantime, and the Sadhu returned to check how diligent the snake had been in the practice of Ahimsā. He was shocked to find the snake lying in a badly hurt and bruised condition. When the Sadhu learned from the snake what had happened, he asked, "What if you had merely hissed and had not bitten the kids and adults when they approached you?" The snake replied, "They would have got scared, and they would have run away without hurting me, or without I hurting them."

The Sadhu said, "Look my son, I had only asked you to refrain from biting and killing people. I did not ask you to stop hissing. Ahimsā does not mean that you do not defend yourself when others attach you. It also does not mean that you will not take steps to prevent attacks happening on you. Ahimsā means that you will not be the first party to hurt and injure others, unless the other person is ready to attack you. It is the right of all living creatures to protect themselves, and Ahimsā cannot be practiced blindly!"

The snake followed the Sadhu's advice and lived a happy and a fearless life thereafter.

27.6 Vegetarianism and the Principle of Ahimsā in Hindu Dharma

Hinduism adopts the middle-path on the question of killing animals for meat. Vegetarianism is not required of all Hindus, although some sects of Hindus consider it a core virtue. In general however, vegetarianism is strongly recommended. As a result, more than 20% Hindus do not eat meat, sea-food and poultry, and others try to curtail their meat consumption to reasonable amounts. The 80% Hindus who eat meat consume just around 7.5 kg per year compared to 100 kg per year in western countries. Meat is not permitted inside most Hindu shrines. The Hindu advocacy of vegetarianism stems from a variety of reasons such as environmental concerns, health, and most of all – from the doctrine of Ahimsa which means not hurting others and being compassionate towards all creatures (human, animals and plants).

Benefits of Vegetarianism/ Harms of Meat Eating:

1. More Ethical: Vegetarian food is more consistent with the Hindu value of Ahimsa, or Love and not harming or hurting others. Simply put, it is bad Karma to eat meat. Some verses advocating vegetarianism may be cited below:

> He who kills harmless and non-violent creatures for his own pleasure will never get true happiness, whether in this life, or after he dies. **Manu Smriti 5.45** (= **Vishnu Dharma Sutra 51.68**)

> He who does not seek to kill, cause pain or tie up living creatures and desires the good of all attains everlasting joy. **Manu Smriti 5.46** (= **Vishnu Dharma Sutra 51.69**)

> Whatever such a man who does not injure any creature thinks of, whatever he strives for and whatever he focuses on –he obtains all that without any effort. **Manu Smriti 5.47** (= **Vishnu Dharma Sutra 51.70**)

Some Hindu scriptures say that the stomach of a meat eater is like the 'graveyard of animal carcasses.'

2. More Spiritual: Meat induces passion and excitement in the mind. Therefore, it is easier for a vegetarian to practice meditation and other spiritual disciplines. For this reason, many Yoga teachers insist that their students become vegetarians as a pre-requisite to practicing Yoga.

3. More Healthy: Ayurvedic and Buddhist texts declare what modern science has found – that a vegetarian diet is more healthy. Meat eaters are more prone to heart disease and certain types of cancers etc.

4. Environmental Reasons: Pound for pound, production of meat requires much more energy, water, soil etc. For e.g., it takes 20 lbs of grains to produce 1 lb of beef. With the rising global population, it is more efficient to produce food via cultivation of crops than via rearing animals for their meat.

5. More Consistent with Human Anatomy: The digestive tract of human beings seems to be more suited to a vegetarian diet than a meat diet.

Drawbacks of Vegetarian Diet and Solutions:

1. In certain parts of the world (e.g., Polar regions), meat is the only form of food available locally easily and cheaply. However, it is not a sin to eat meat if we live in these regions.
2. A meat based diet is rich in proteins and conversely a vegetarian diet can be protein deficient. While meat has all the required essential amino acids for the human body, plants rarely have all of them individually. However, this deficiency can be overcome by incorporating protein rich plant origin foodstuffs like soy, legumes etc., and by mixing and matching foods (e.g., grains with pulses).
3. A meat based diet is rich in certain minerals, vitamins and other nutrients e.g., B-12, Omega-3, that are difficult to obtain from plant sources. This deficiency can be overcome by combining dairy products with a vegan diet. Supplements are also available to overcome these deficiencies.
4). In certain medical conditions, the patient might be forced to consume animal products so that his body gets adequate protein for its functioning.

QUIZ: Which of the following foods have egg, sea-food or animal flesh and bone products?

1. Marshmallows.
2. Jello
3. Yo-Plait Yoghurt
4. Cake
5. Kraft Cheese
6. McDonald French Fries
7. Caesar Salad

GOOD HINDUS SHOULD LOOK FOR INGREDIENTS LIKE 'RENNET', 'GELATIN' when you buy food and avoid them. Gelatin is derived from animal bones and hooves. Rennet is curdled milk obtained from the stomach of a calf that is slaughtered while it is still feeding on the milk of its mother cow!

27.8 Hunting, Fishing and the Ideal of Ahimsa:

Fishing and Hunting are the source of livelihood and food for many people. On the other hand, many hunt and fish for mere sport. From the point of view of Ahimsā, the first is not as bad as the other. It is a fact of life that many people have no food other than meat and fish available for them to eat. And for this reason, Hindu Dharma does not absolutely require everyone to be a vegetarian, even though it is a desirable option.

Discussion:

1. If your friend asks you to accompany him on hunting or a fishing trip, how will you respond to him?
2. In the year 1947, India was wracked by severe violence between the Hindus and Muslims. Millions of Hindus were ethnically cleansed out of Pakistan and packed off to India, and millions of Muslims similarly fled from India to Pakistan. When a group of Hindu refugees came to see Gandhi and described how their wives and children had been kidnapped and slaughtered, Mahatma Gandhi advised them, "No Hindu in Pakistan should resist his attackers. It is better to die in your homeland without any resistance by practicing Ahimsa, rather than flee to India to save your lives." What is your opinion on Mahatma Gandhi's advice?

28. Peacefulness (Shānti)

28.1 What is Shānti?

Peacefulness means that we should avoid conflicts and should not be quarrelsome. Whenever a dispute arises, we should try to resolve it. It also means being calm and composed at all times, speaking softly, acting gently and not creating conflict between different people.

28.2 Why should we practice Peacefulness?

Adhering to the principle of peacefulness prevents needless hatreds, bloodshed and violence. We must try to avoid conflicts from starting in the first place and nip any potential causes of conflict right in the bud. Because, even if peace is re-established after a conflict, memories of prior conflict do remain in our minds. Which is why a Sage says-

> "A creeper that has been cut can be made to grow again, but it will never look as beautiful as it used to. Similarly, an affectionate relationship that has been spoilt, can be revived again, but it will not have the same charm as it used to." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 49**

28.3 The Four Steps of Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are inevitable in real life and we must solve them. To promote peace, Hindu scriptures say that we should follow these four steps to address our disputes so that we do not have too much violence in our world:

> "There are four ways that should be adopted one after the other (in successive order) to get things done:
>
> 1. Saama: Counseling, appealing to reason and rationale.
> 2. Daana: Offer sops, or forgive, or let go.
> 3. Bheda: Threats of bad consequences if the opponent does not concede or mend his ways.
> 4. Danda: Punishment (through violence or other means).
>
> The initial means are preferable to later ones but all the four are legitimate for the king." ***Arthashastra of Kautilya (3rd cent. BCE) See also Sage Manu's Code of Dharma 7.198-200***
>
> "When all efforts to obtain justice and save oneself from oppression fail and no other recourse is left, it is justified to lift the sword and fight." ***Guru Gobind Singh in the Zafarnama*** (an epistle written to the Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb)

Story: Example of how Krishna followed the four step process to aim for Shanti

In the Mahabharata, we see very clearly how Krishna followed the four fold process to aim for peace when it became clear that a war would break out between the Kauravas and the Pandavas when the former refused to return the kingdom of Pandavas to them.

When the Pandavas lost the gambling match to the Kauravas, they had to surrender their kingdom to the latter and go to the forest for 13 years. The agreement was that after 13 years, the Kauravas would return the kingdom of Pandavas to them. But, when the time came, Duryodhana refused to honor the agreement and said that he will not return their kingdom.

A war was inevitable, but Yudhishthira, the eldest Pandava did not want any bloodshed. Therefore, at the advice of Krishna, they sent Sanjaya as their ambassador with the proposal of peace. Sanjaya explained to Duryodhana how the Pandavas had fulfilled all their conditions of the 13 year long exile, and therefore deserved to get their kingdom back (Saama). But Duryodhana refused and said that he does not fear a war with the Pandavas. The elders of Duryodhana's court suggested to Duryodhana that he should meet Krishna and get his advice on the correct course of action. But out of pride, Duryodhana refused. When Krishna heard this, He decided to go to see Duryodhana with a peace proposal.

He again argued that the Pandavas deserved to get their kingdom back. But when Duryodhana was adamant, he asked the elders in Duryodhana's court to put some sense into Duryodhana's head (Saama). But Duryodhana refused to listen even to his own mother Gāndhāri. Krishna then even proposed that instead of returning the entire kingdom, he could just return the capital Indraprastha and five villages to the Pandavas (Daana), but Duryodhana arrogantly responded, "I will not give even that much land to them which can balance on the tip of a needle."

At this, Krishna clearly threatened war and warned Duryodhana that the blame for all the ensuing bloodshed will fall on Duryodhana. The latter became very angry, and he ordered Krishna to be arrested and imprisoned. But Krishna showed his Divine Form that was so full of light and brilliance that even Dhritrashtra (the congenitally blind father of Duryodhana) had to cover his eyes to stop the glare. Now, all the elders in Duryodhana's court were scared of Krishna's wrath and they reasoned with him again to heed Krishna's advice, compromise and threat. But Duryodhana merely dismissed Krishna as a cheap trickster.

Krishna then went back to the Pandavas and exhorted them to prepare for war. At the battlefield, Arjuna suddenly became overcome by pacifist thoughts, and said that he did not want to cause any bloodshed. But Krishna taught him the Bhagavad Gita and inspired him to fight the righteous war (Danda). Throughout the 18 days of war, Krishna guided the Pandavas and led them to a victory over the Kauravas.

This example shows how Krishna tried his utmost to prevent a war for the sake of Shānti, but when the first three steps of conflict resolution failed, he directed Pandavas to punish the Kauravas through a war (Danda).

28.4 Legitimate Targets of Violence: When do we reject the Four Step Process for Resolving Conflicts?

In general, Ahimsā is an over-arching principle that should govern our entire life. But practicing Ahimsa does not mean that all violence is bad. There are some cases where we should indulge in violence immediately without waiting for any discussion, concession or threatening.

Bheeshma said – He who is thoroughly evil is in fact already killed by his evil actions. The killer of a very evil person does not commit any sin. Any human being can therefore resolve to kill evil doers who have lost their sense of intellect completely. **Mahābhārata 12.109.28**

"Six are the terrorists – One who sets fire (arson), one who poisons, one who is read to kill with a drawn weapon, one who takes money by force, land-grabber, and one who kidnaps a woman." ***Sage Vashishta's Code of Dharma***

"One who kills a terrorist overtly or covertly is not to be blamed, because such an act is merely extinguishing anger with anger." ***Sage Manu's Code of Dharma 8.351***

"One's Guru, a scholarly Brahmana, a child or an elder – even if these are terrorists, they must be killed immediately without second thought." ***Sage Manu's Code of Dharma 8.350***

Note that in all these cases, Hindu tradition allows us to directly resort to violence without following the first three steps of conflict resolution.

Some other cases where Hindu scriptures permit violence are:

1. In a war to defend one's country or a war to defeat evil forces.
2. To kill terrorists (Aatataayii) who indulge in mass slaughter, setting homes of others afire, poison public sources of water etc., create enmity between different sections of the society, abuse women, kill children etc.
3. Some violence is inevitable for preparing our own food even if we are vegetarians.
4. In self-defense against a violent attack.
5. Killing venomous and violent creatures or bugs for expanding agriculture etc. E.g. snakes, locusts, rats.

28.5 Non-Legitimate Targets of Violence:

Even when we are engaged in warfare, there are certain people whom we must never harm. In fact, the ethics of warfare in Hindu Dharma were very much ahead of their times, and the modern humane rules of war are very consistent with what Hindu scriptures taught several thousand years back!

> "When he (a warrior) fights with his foes in battle, let him not strike with weapons concealed (in wood), nor with (such as are) barbed, poisoned, or the points of which are blazing with fire. Let him not strike one who (in flight) has climbed on a structure of height, nor a eunuch, nor one who joins the palms of his hands (in supplication), nor one who (flees) with flying hair, nor one who sits down, nor one who says 'I am thine;' Nor one who sleeps, nor one who has lost his coat of mail, nor one who is naked, nor one who is disarmed, nor one who looks on without taking part in the fight, nor one who is fighting with another (foe); Nor one whose weapons are broken, nor one afflicted (with sorrow), nor one who has been grievously wounded, nor one who is in fear, nor one who has turned to flight; (but in all these cases let him) remember the duty (of honourable warriors)." **Manusmriti** (***Sage Manu's Code of Dharma) 7-90-93***

28.6 The Correct Attitude for Fighting

Violence involves a lot of hatred, aggression and bloodshed. But Hindu scriptures constant teach us that we should fight only for a higher cause, to defend Dharma and the weak and not for any selfish motives. When we fight for personal gain, the war involves a lot of bad karma but when we fight for principles, then Bhagavān forgives us for the violence that we have to inflict.

> "Considering your duty as a warrior, understand that there is no better fortune than fighting for the sake of Dharma – there is no greater duty for a warrior. Lucky are those warriors for whom such opportunities appear, opening the very gates of heaven for them." ***Gita 2.31-32***
>
> "You should fight (a righteous war) because it is your duty, and without regard for personal happiness or sorrow, loss or gain, victory or defeat – if you fight with this attitude, then you will never incur sin***." Gita 2.38***
>
> "Therefore, remember Me in your heart at all times and fight (i.e. keep Me in your heart even when you fight in the battlefield)." ***Gita 8.7ab***

28.7 The Glory of a Soldier

Compared to Islam and Christianity, Hindu Dharma is a very tolerant and a peaceful religion that does not advocate warfare to promote one's religion. This does not mean that Hindus look down upon the very profession of soldiers. In fact, Hindu scriptures remind us that war is a higher calling in which human beings out their very lives at risk to defend their country, their families, their principles etc. In fact a war fought for higher principles is the most unselfish sacrifice that one can make because a dead soldier is no longer present to enjoy the victory of his army. Therefore, Hindu scriptures glorify the profession of a soldier in the following words -

“The glory of only two types of people exceeds the splendor of the sun – the ascetic who is steadfast in Yoga, and the soldier who courts death while fighting bravely in the battlefield.”
Sage Parashara’s Code of Dharma 3.32
“The Heaven that the Brahmanas seek through the performance of several austerities and religious ceremonies is attained in a moment by a warrior who loses his life in the battlefield.”
Sage Parashara’s Code of Dharma 3.38

It should be kept in mind that Rama, Krishna, Durga and most of our Devis and Devatas carry different kinds of weapons in their hands. They are not war-mongering, but they are ever ready to fight violent Asuras for the sake of the Universe.

Story: General Hari Singh Nalwa thrashes the Pathans

Peacefulness does not always solve all our problems. Those who desire peace should also be willing to lift arms. The following story from the history of India is very instructive in this regard.

Hari Singh Nalwa, the great Sikh commander in the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was once in Kashmir in northern India. He got a message from the Maharaja saying, “The Pathans have started gathering their forces at Attock on our western borders. Go and defeat them before they threaten our entire country.”

Hari Singh Nalwa immediately gathered his troops in Kashmir and started marching westwards towards Attock. On the way, he stopped close to the modern town of Abbotabad, where another community of Pathans lived. These Pathans blocked his way. Hari Singh Nalwa wanted to reach Attock swiftly, without fighting this second group of Pathans in Abbotabad. Therefore, he asked them for their conditions for clearing his way and allowing him to proceed further towards Attock.

But the Pathans replied, “Yes, we do have some conditions. But we will decide among ourselves and will let you know by tonight. But when the night came, the Pathans said, ‘We are still discussing this matter, and will let you know tomorrow.” The following day, they gave the same excuse. In this ways, 3 days passed. Hari Singh got

worried that if he delayed further, the Pathans at Attock will attack the Sikh kingdom.

That night, it started raining heavily. Hari Singh Nalwa started hearing 'thumping' sounds. Upon enquiry, his attendant said, "Sir, when it rains here, the soil becomes very soggy and muddy. To prevent it from becoming slippery, the Pathans have to pound it. This is the very special nature of soil of this region – it must be pounded to keep it from becoming slippery."

Hari Singh Nalwa thought, "I think that the Pathans of this area too are very slippery and they should be pounded!" He immediately ordered his troops to start catching the Pathans and beat them up. Within a few hours, the Pathan leaders of Abbotabad sent a delegation with apologies. They said that they have no conditions and will allow Hari Singh Nalwa's troops a free passage to Attock.

This story demonstrates the truth that some people in this world listen and behave only when they are threatened and beaten up, not when their lapses are forgiven and even if they are given good education. There is a proverb in Hindi, "Laaton ke bhoot baton se nahim maanatey" (Ghosts which deserve to be thrashed do not come to terms with mere talks). The fact of life is that forgiveness and Ahimsā are ideals that do not always work, and we should use our wise judgment in using these ideals rather than following then blindly.

Hindu Prayer for Love, Peace and Friendship

May the Heavens grant us Peace, May the Skies grant us Peace
May the Earth grant us Peace.
May we get Peace from the Waters, Peace from our grains, Peace from the wild Plants.
May all the wise men generate Peace, May the Scriptural teachings promote Peace.
May everything in this world grant me Peace, May Peace give me Peace.
And may that great and true Peace abide in me. ***Shukla Yajurveda 36.17***

O Supreme Lord, Make me firm and resolute like Thee.
Bless that all may look on me with a friendly eye.
And I look on others likewise. May we experience complete harmony among us. **Shukla Yajurveda 36.18**

Discussion

In May 2001, US Navy Seals stealthily entered a house in the city of Abbotabad in Pakistan and located the wanted terrorist Osama bin Laden from his bedroom. They shot him in the eye and killed him, and then dumped his body in the ocean. Several people thought that instead of killing him point-blank, he should have been disabled by shots to his leg. Then, he should have been brought to the United States and tried under the court of law. Do you agree or disagree? Do you think that the United States should have followed the principles of Ahimsā and Shānti, and should have prosecuted him under their legal system?

29. Compassion towards all Creatures

29.1 Types of Compassion.

There are several words in Sanskrit and English that denote different grades and types of compassion-

Mercy: Forgive the lapses of other. The Sanskrit word for this is Kshamā

Compassion: Beholding others with love even when they commit a lot of evil actions. A compassionate person always hopes and prays that the evil person will get reformed. It is more of a mental emotion, and the Sanskrit word for this emotion is 'karuṇā'.

Kindness: Act to alleviate the sufferings of others. Compared to compassion, it is more action oriented. The Sanskrit word for kindness is 'dayā.'

29.2 What is Compassion?

Swami Tejoymayananda explains the ideal very eloquently-

> "What do we mean by compassion? It is the ability to stand by and see other suffer. It is not something passive but where one actively tries to alleviate the suffering of others. Many times we have abundant compassion for people of our own country or religion, but for others we have little or none. Sometimes we are large-hearted to people, but cruel to animals. Some people slaughter animals for food, clothing, and for sport and abuse them for medical and cosmetic experiments. How then are we to follow a spiritual path? Compassion is at the very heart of religions and righteousness. Our compassion should include plants and animals. When we destroy trees indiscriminately, we suffer the results of our actions expressed in a damaged ecology. Whenever we cause such harm we suffer the consequences automatically." Swami Tejomayananda[33]

The significant point to note is that Hindu Dharma lays great emphasis on extending the practice of compassion to animals and plants as well, whereas Islam and Christianity lack that emphasis. The reason for this difference is that Hindus believe that animals and plants also have a soul, whereas within the Abrahamic religions, there is a debate whether animals and plants have a soul or not.

29.3 Difference between Compassion and Pity

Compassion is often confused with Pity. The former is a positive virtue, where the latter is a negative (or best a neutral) behavior. Again Swami Tejoyamanda explains the difference between the two-

> "Compassion is something other than pity. Pity suggests distance, even a certain condescendence. I often act with pity. I give some money to a beggar on the streets of Toronto or New York City, but I do not look him in his eyes, sit down with him, or talk

[33] Compassion, the Manamam Series. 2007. Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy, California, p. 2

with him. I am too busy to really pay attention to the man who reaches out to me. My money replaces my personal attention and gives me an excuse to walk on.
Compassion means to become close to the one who suffers. But we can come close to another person only when we are willing to become vulnerable ourselves. A compassionate person says: "I am your brother; I am your sister; I am human, fragile, and mortal, just like you. I am not scandalized by your tears, nor afraid of your pain. I too have wept. I too have felt pain." We can be with the other only when the other ceases to be "other" and becomes like us.
This, perhaps, is the main reason that we sometimes find it easier to show pity than compassion. The suffering person calls us to become aware of our own suffering. How can I respond to someone's loneliness unless I am in touch with my own experience with loneliness? How can I be close to handicapped people when I refuse to acknowledge my own handicaps? How can I be with the poor when I am unwilling to confess my own poverty?" – Henri J. M. Nowen"[34]

29.4 Why Should we Practice the Ideal of Compassion?

There are several reasons due to which we should show compassion in our behavior. These reasons are illustrated through the stories below-

REASON 1: Show compassion because no one is worthy of total contempt. Everyone has some unique and special ability.

Story: Swami Chinmayananda appreciates a Mentally Disturbed Student

"We were at a Yagna somewhere in the US. It was in the middle years of his [Swami Chinmayananda's] world tours in the 1980s. A very disturbed woman was one of the registrants. She created havoc wherever she went, and everyone shunned her because her behavior was so disruptive. The organizers wanted to make her leave. Even though we were all in various degrees of unrest ourselves, she stood out because of her seeming loss of touch with reality. In any case, Gurudev made the decision that she should stay. At the end of the camp, she presented him with a wonderful portrait of himself. He held it up proudly for everyone to see it, showing us that there is untapped beauty in everyone. I remember all of us feeling thoroughly ashamed for treating her the way we did. We all learned a great lesson that day. Gurudev showed us the way of compassion and inclusiveness, and that His teachings were for everyone…."[35]

REASON 2: Show compassion because everyone deserves to progress in their lives, and we can lend a helping hand.

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[34] *Compassion, the Manamam Series*. 2007. Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy, California, p. 10
[35] Page 69 in "Vedanta: Swami Chinmayananda – His Words, His Legacy," Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy, California (2011).

Story: Ramanujacharya Disobeys his Guru

Shri Ramaujacharya was a great Hindu saint who lived in south India from 1017 – 1137 C.E. Once, he learned that a teacher named Goshthipūrṇa knew a powerful secret mantra with which one can really please Lord Vishnu and ask for several boons in return.

Shri Ramanujacharya approached the teacher, and requests to be taught the mantra. The teacher agrees, but on one condition – that he will keep the mantra secret and will not teach it to anyone else. Shri Ramanujacharya agreed to this condition.

Guru Goshtipurna then taught him the sacred Vaishnava mantra "Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya" on the condition that he would not each it to others. However, thinking that such a liberation granting mantra must not be hidden from the masses, Ramanuja climbed the top of the temple at Thirukottiyur temple in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and started preaching it to all.

Guru Goshtipurna was very angry at this act of disobedience and scolded Ramanuja saying that he will surely go to Hell for disobeying his Guru. Ramanuja replied that if his going to Hell could give liberation to many others, he would not mind sacrificing residing in Hell.

The words of Ramanuja moved his Guru and he was moved to tears. The Guru embraced his student and said that he alone has understood the true meaning of the mantra.

In the spiritual tradition of Sri Ramanuja, another great saint named Pillai Lokāchārya (1205- 1311) was born a century later. So pleased was Bhagavān Vishnu with him that He blessed the saint saying that whosoever associates with Lokacharya will also come to Vishnu with him. So compassionate was Pillai Lokacharya that thereafter, he would touch even ants lovingly and would stare at plants for a long time so that even the souls of these living things would go to Bhagavān Vishnu.

Story: Sant Shankar Dev of Assam shows Compassion on a Leper

Tulsiram, a distant relative of saint Shankaradeva, got afflicted with leprosy. Many forms of the disease are contagious and there was no cure for it in those days. Lepers were shunned by everyone and kept away from the villages. No one wanted Tulsiram close to them. Shankaradeva took pity on Tulsidram. He got a house constructed for Tulsiram at a convenient location where he could get water easily. Shankaradeva asked Tulsiram to plant 100 Tulsi (ocinum sanctum) bushes around his house (because Tulsi can cure leprosy) and pray to Krishna day and night. He also made sure that Tulsiram got a steady and constant supply of food from charitable passers-by. In the course of time, Tulsiram got cured of his disease and was completely healed. He became a disciple of Shankaradeva.

REASON 3: Show compassion towards all because all Human Beings are one big family

Story: Rishi Vishvamitra shares the joys and sorrows of others out of Compassion

Once, Rishi Vishvamitra and his disciples passed through a region that was struck with a devastating drought. There was no food to be had and the locals were starving. So the people of the area could obviously not give any food to the Rishi and his entourage as alms.

One of the Rishi's students came to him and said, "The only thing I can find for us to eat is a carcass of a dog. But how can we eat rotting dog-flesh?" Rishi Vishvamitra said, "It is better to eat rotting dog meat than die of hunger. Bring the carcass here in my bowl. When he received the bowl, the Rishi sprinked some holy water on it and prayed, "Our Dharma teaches us that before we eat anything, we should offer a portion to the Devatās in heaven. So I am offering the first piece to them." Meanwhile, in heaven, the Devatās felt embarrassed that the Rishi was dying of hunger and had been forced procure a dead dog. They also felt revolted that he should offer them the dog meat. Therefore, Indra, the King of Devatās, came down to earth with a pitcher of Amrit (the nectar that gives immortality) and offered it to the Rishi saying, "I am sorry respected Rishi. That meat of dog is not fit for you and your students to eat. Instead, I have brought this pitcher of Amrit for you. Please throw away the meat in your bowl and drink this instead."

When Rishi Vishvamitra heard Indra, he became very angry and replied, "How dare you offer this Amrit to me and my students when everyone else in this area is dying of hunger? Their cattle has also died because you have not sent down any rains. All I found therefore was this dead dog to eat. So what is wrong if I offer a portion to you? After all, you are responsible for this. I am not a selfish person who would want to become immortal while everyone is dying around me."

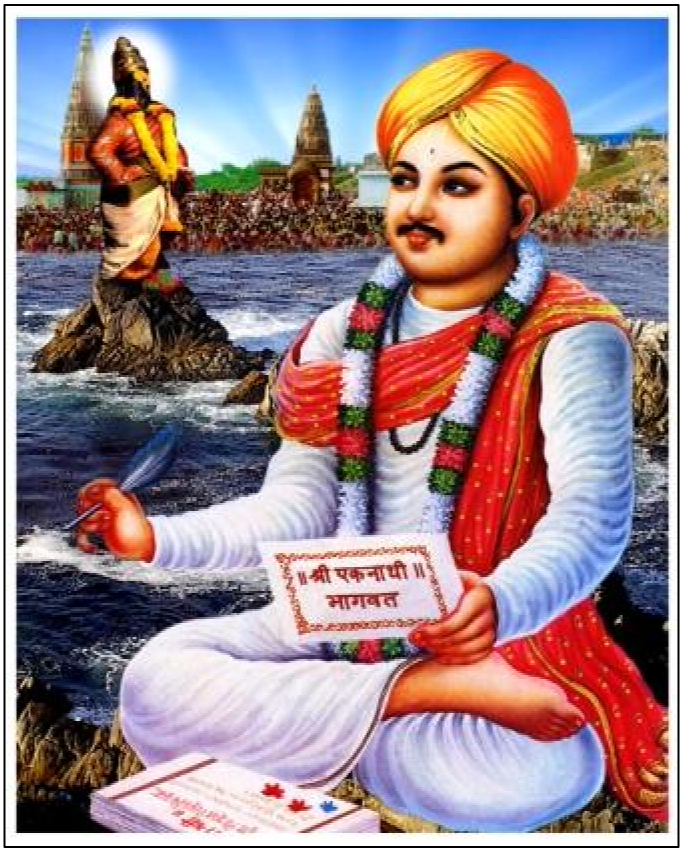
Indra said, "Respected Rishi, I am moved by your compassion. You and your disciples could have drank the Amrit and become immortal. Yet, you did not forsake the people of this village who gave you shelter to die on their own. I will cause rains to come down to this region immediately." It started pouring in the land, and once again, people were able to grow food and prevent starvation deaths. The people all thanked Rishi Vishvamitra for standing by them and forsaking his own immortality for their sake.

Reason 4: Show Compassion even towards Animals because Bhagavān is present inside everyone.

Story: Seeing Bhagavān in non-Humans-Sant Ekanath sees Rama in a Donkey

In Abrahamic religions, it is debated whether animals and plants even have souls. Their sole purpose, according to those religions, is to serve the needs of human beings.

However, Hindu Dharma teaches us that animals have the same soul as we do, and Brahman resides equally in animals as in human beings. Therefore, our empathy and regard should not be restricted merely to human beings, but must also extent to other living creatures. The beautiful story below demonstrates how Hindu saints have practiced this understanding of the truth in their lives. It is beliefs like these that form the basis of the Hindu custom of vegetarianism.



Once, Sant Ekanath was travelling from Varanasi in north India towards Rameshvaram in south India with some water from the Ganga river. It is a Hindu tradition to offer Ganga water to the Shiva-linga at Rameshvaram. On their way, he and his disciples were travelling through an extremely hot and dry part of India.

Everyone wanted to quench their thirst but the only water was the Ganga water they were carrying. No one wanted to drink it himself because it was meant for worship at Rameshvaram. Suddenly, Ekanatha saw a donkey lying on the ground, dying of thirst.

Ekanatha was filled with compassion. He immediately took his pitcher of the Ganga water, and poured it into the mouth of the dying donkey. With its thirst quenched, the donkey revived.

Shocked at this act, a disciple asked Ekanatha, “Guru-ji, we have travelled hundreds of miles with this holy water to perform worship in Rameshvaram. Now where will we get the water of Ganga for our worship of Rameshvaram’s Shiva now?” Ekanatha replied, “This is my Rameshvara.”

Ekanatha demonstrated through his deed that Bhagavān resides even in a donkey, and if we cannot treat animals with compassion, we cannot claim that we love Bhagavān.

Story: Sant Vallalar cries out of Compassion for exhausted Bullocks

The compassion of Ramalingam Adigal Vallalar (1823 – 1874 CE): In the 19th century CE, there lived a charismatic saint Vallalar, close to the temple of Chidambaram. He opposed caste based distinctions among Hindus, promoted vegetarianism and Sevā, and feeding the poor as the best worship of Bhagavān. His sermons were very famous, and many people travelled from distance places to listen to him.

One day, a village headman from a village at a distance started from his home on a bullock card to listen to the Swami's sermons. On the way, the bullocks felt hungry and thirsty, but the headman told the cart driver not to stop the card lest they are late for the sermon. As soon as they reached the residence of Vallalar, the headman rushed in and bowed to the saint. But, the Swami just got up and went outside the room, surprising everyone because he never got up in the middle of a sermon.

When the Swami did not return after a long time, the assembled people went out to check. They saw that the Swami was feeding the bullocks some water and grass, and had tears in his eyes. He was telling the animals, "Because of me, you had to suffer, and had to go hungry and thirsty." When the village headman saw this, he realized his mistake, and fell at the Swami's feet. The Swami's act of piety and compassion made the headman realize that Bhagavān resides even in animals. Therefore, if we cannot be kind to animals, there is no use of attending spiritual sermons.

Reason 5: Love and Compassion alone develop true relationships, not power and force.

Story: Prince Siddhārtha saves the life of a Swan

The prince grew up to be a nice boy who had a lot of compassion for everyone. One day, he was watching a flock of swans flying in the sky. Suddenly, one of them fell down, shot by an arrow. Siddhartha rushed to the fallen swan. He gently pulled out the arrow and started nursing the wounds of the bird. After a few minutes, Devadatta, his cousin, arrived at the scene and started quarreling with Siddhartha. Devadatta said. "I shot the bird with my arrow. Therefore, it is my prey and it belongs to me. The hunter gets to keep the target that it shot!" But Siddhartha said, "I saved the life of the bird. Therefore, it belongs to me." The matter was taken to the king and he said, "One who saves a life is greater than he who kills an innocent creature. Therefore, the bird belongs to Siddhartha." The prince was overjoyed. He took care of the innocent bird till it was ready to fly on its own and join his friends in the sky.

Reason 6: Practice Compassion because it has the power to reform criminals.

Story- The Kindness of Mahatma Gandhi reforms a Thief:

"One night a thief entered the āshrama of Mahatma Gandhi. Someone woke up with the sound and saw the thief. He woke up many other people in the āshrama and caught the thief. They kept him in one room and waited for the morning. In the morning they took the thief to Gandhiji. The thief was shivering with fear. Gandhiji looked at the thief and asked, "Did you have breakfast?" Gandhiji then looked at the manager of the āshrama and said, "Why, is he not a human being? First feed him. Will talk of

punishment later." The thief was touched by the kindness and changed his behavior to correct himself."[36]

Discussion:

Sometimes, people suffer from incurable and painful diseases. They request that their life be terminated to end their painful suffering. Different countries have different laws governing this 'mercy killing' or Euthanasia. Some allow it, others consider it a crime. What is your opinion on it?

[36] Hindu Culture. Grade 9 Bala Vihar Teachers' Handbook. 2011. Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy (California), lesson 24

30. Gentleness (mārdavam)

30.1 What is Gentleness?

We should be polite and helpful to others, respectful towards elders and our teachers and loving towards little children. We should show compassion towards animals and plants and other dumb and helpless creatures. Hindu scriptures say that our speech action and our thoughts should be as sweet as honey, free of harshness and cruelty-

> May the tip of my tongue be sweet as honey, may the base of my tongue be sweet as honey. May there always be honey like sweetness in all my actions. May that sweetness abide within my heart. **Atharvaveda 1.34.2**

30.2 Why Should we Practice Gentleness?

Gentleness is an extension of Compassion especially in relationship to the more meek, weak and helpless creatures, and even lifeless objects. Swami Tejomayanda explains-

> "We can augment our compassion with the practice of *mārdavam* or gentleness. This is an attitude of mind that is not only limited to living things but extends to insentient material objects as well. If we handle all things with care, they will serve us beautifully. For instance, some people take proper care of their cars but others are so rough with them, there is no gentleness when they apply the brake, change gears or shit the door. In the same way, we should remember that shoes are serving our feet, and we should place them down with respect. Once a man came running to a Zen Master, threw his shoes here and there, and fell at his feet saying, "Please teach me about God." The Master calmly replied, "First learn to respect your shoes." How we take care of inert objects reveals the state of the mind. This *mārdavam* is a disposition of the mind. When a person has this state of mind, all his actions have a quality of gentleness." – Swami Tejomayananda[37]

30.3 Gentleness and Sensitivity:

Being gentle also means being sensitive to the likes and dislikes of others. Sometimes, we say or do something that hurts others, even though it was not our intention to hurt them. We should make an effort to understand what pleases and hurts the other person, so that we avoid causing pain to them.

At times however, we have to be stern for the sake of discipline or for punishing evil doers -

[37] *Compassion, the Manamam Series*. 2007. Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy, California, p. 3

Bheeshma said – He who becomes gentle as well as stern appropriately as the situation requires accomplishes all his tasks. He overcomes all of his enemies. **Mahābhārata 12.140.37**

But in all these cases, the guiding principle should still be gentleness and our intent in punishing should be not revenge or causing pain to that person, but to reform him and make him a better person.

Story: Krishna's Gentleness toward the Birds

A beautiful tale is narrated in the oral Hindu tradition demonstrating the gentleness that Krishna showed towards lesser creatures. On one day of the Mahabharata war, Krishna noticed that on a nearby hillock, there was a nest containing recently hatched birdlings.

The roaring sounds of the trumpets and the clang and clatter of weapons was terrifying the newborn birds. Krishna took a giant metal bell that had fallen off the neck of a war elephant, and covered the next with it (leaving a hole for breathing). When the war was over, He went to the hillock and removed the bell.

Story: Aesop's Fable on Gentleness

One day, the sun and the wind started quarreling amongst themselves as to who is the greater of the two. Suddenly, they saw a traveler walking on a street with a shawl wrapped around him. The wind said to the sun, "You will see how my might will force the shawl to fly off the traveler's body."

So the wind blew hard, but the traveler clasped onto his shawl. The harder the wind blew, the firmer was the grip of the traveler on the shawl. No matter with how much force the wind blew, the traveler would just not let go his shawl. Finally, the find grew tired and gave up.

Now it was the sun's turn. The sun sent down warm and loving rays of light on earth. Soon, the traveler started feeling too warm. So he unwrapped the shawl from around his body and folded it neatly and held it in his hands. The sun said to wind and said, 'See, what your force and power could not achieve, my gentle warmth was able to do."

31. Empathy (Ātmaupamyatā)

31.1 What is Empathy:

Empathy means that in our interactions with others, we should always put ourselves in their place and imagine how they would feel. When we do this, we will realize that we will be fair, just and kind towards others. Just as we do not like being attacked, beaten, lied to, cheated and so on, others do not as well. Empathy helps us to understand the feelings and perspectives of others and stops us from behaving towards them unjustly.

31.2 Why Should we Practice Empathy:

There are several good reasons for practicing empathy.

1. The same Bhagavān resides in all of us as our indwelling soul, and he connects all creatures just as thread goes through the peals and gems in a necklace. Therefore, through Him, we are all interconnected. Any injury to others is bound to affect us even if remotely. And any happiness that we give to us will also eventually recoil to us.

> When he has identified the unison between all the moving things (incl. creatures) and the Atma, where is the question of him getting in to delusion or sorrow (or a sleep or dizziness driven by any of these)? **Īsha Upanishad 6**

2. Empathy is the Golden Rule to judge what is right and what is wrong behavior. We will never do to others what we do not want them to do to us if we practice the ideal of empathy.

> That one, who is able to visualize the presence of Atma in all other moving things and even creatures and is able to visualize the presence of all such things within the Atma, never gets angry and he never hates anything in life. **Īsha Upanishad 6**

31.3 Scriptural Quotations on Empathy:

> In My view, that Yogi is the best who puts himself in the place of others at all times, and seeing his own identity with them, he is able to experience their pain and pleasure. ***Gita 6.32***
>
> This is what is said to be declared as the essence of all Dharma – One should not do that to that we would not like to be done to oneself. **Devala Smriti (quoted in Kriyaratnaakara)**
>
> He alone sees who sees all other beings the same as oneself. **Apastamba Smriti 10.12**
>
> Do not do that to others that you would not like to be done to you- this is the brief definition of Dharma. And yet, overcome by passions, humans do not behave according to this essence of Dharma. Just as receiving gifts and not receiving gifts, happiness and

sadness, likes and dislikes cause joy and sorrow to us respectively, so do they to others as well. Therefore we should always put ourselves in others' place when dealing with them. **Mahabharata 13.114.8-9**

Example of Empathy:

Hindu tradition shows examples of saints where they literally experienced the pain of someone else in their proximity. Example, once Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa saw a man being whipped and he so empathized with the victim that marks of whipping started appearing on his own back!

Discussion

1. Does this example show your empathy – You are allergic to dairy products and therefore do not eat yoghurt, milk based deserts or milk. Your best friend arrives at your home. You think, "Let me not give him any deserts to eat. I would not want him to serve me any dairy based deserts. Therefore, out of empathy, I should not be serving these items to him as well." [Hint: In empathy, you try to understand the other person, whereas in this case, you want them to understand you].

32. Humility and Respect for Everyone

"Humility is strange – the moment you think you have it, you have lost it." Swami Chinmayananda

32.1 Humility and Respect:

We should not show pride, conceit or arrogance towards anyone. Instead, we should treat everyone with request. We must not try to put others down and try to project ourselves as superior to others. Whenever we get acclaim or recognition, we must always credit it to others who have helped us, and also thank Bhagavān for his grace in enabling it. We should also respect others irrespective of who they are.

Humility and Respect are often two sides of the same coin. Humility involves lowering ourselves in front of others, whereas respect means elevating the person in front of us. If is not possible to be humble and disrespectful at the same time. Humility exalts us - it does not make us small. Similarly, we do not become smaller when we give respect to another person.

In the Hindu tradition, humility and being respectful are considered as marks of being an educated and a cultured person. "Education bestows humility" (vidyā dadāti vinayam) goes a Sanskrit maxim. Another Sanskrit proverb reads-

> "It is the fruit-laden tree whose branches bend. Similarly, it is a cultured person endowed with several qualities who is bows out of humility. But fools and dried out trees never bend." **Sanskrit proverb**

32.2 Why should we be Humble and Respectful?

In addition to the fact that being humble and respectful are marks of a good education and possession of several good qualities, Hindu scriptures give many other reasons-

1. We should not be arrogant or disrespectful because in reality, every living creature has an identical soul in them. So we are not superior to anyone in our essence.

> The wise see the same (Brahman) with an equal eye, in a learned and humble brāhmaña, in a cow, in an elephant, in a dog, and even in a dog eater (outcast). **Gita 5.18**

We might think that someone is lowly or ugly, but the fact is that the entire universe is sacred because Bhagavān is present equally even inside what we consider ugliness etc. **See the story of the Jagannatha Mandir below.**

2. The second reason is that Bhagavān resides within everyone. When we love others, honor them and respect them, we are actually doing the same to Bhagavān. Conversely, if we hate and

disrespect others, then we are abusing Bhagavān no matter who many ceremonies and prayers we may do. **See the story from the life of Shankaracharya below.**

> I abide in all beings as their innermost soul. Disregarding My Presence within them, men make a show of worshipping Me through images. **Shrimad Bhagavatam 3.29.21**
> If one disregards Me present in all as their soil and Lord but ignorantly offers worship only to images, such worship is as ineffective as sacrificial offerings made in ashes. **Shrimad Bhagavatam 3.29. 22**
> A man who persecutes Me residing in others, who is proud and haughty, who looks upon God as the other – such a person will never attain to peace of mind. **Shrimad Bhagavatam 3.29. 23**
> If a man disregards and persecutes fellow beings, but worships Me in images with numerous rituals and rich offerings, I am not at all pleased with him for proffering such worship. **Shrimad Bhagavatam 3.29.24**
> A man should, however, worship Me in images, side by side with discharging his duties, which include the love of all beings, until he actually realizes My Presence in himself and in all beings. **Shrimad Bhagavatam 3.29. 25**
> As long as man is self-centered and makes an absolute distinction between himself and others (without recognizing the unity of all in Me, the Inner Pervader), he will be subject to the great fear of Death (including every form of deprivation of self-interest). **Shrimad Bhagavatam 3.29.26**
> So overcoming the seprativeness of a self-centered life, one should serve all beings with gifts, honor and love, recognizing that such service is really being rendered to Me who reside in all beings as their inner-most soul. **Shrimad Bhagavatam 3.29. 27**

3. When we are humble and respectful, the other person feels happy. We make friends easily, and we gain their trust and affection in return. Therefore, it serves a useful and a practical purpose to be humble and respectful. **See the story from the life of Swami Dayanand Saraswati below.**
4. The fourth reason is that no one is perfect. Everyone, including we commit mistakes sometime in our life. Therefore, accepting our mistakes with humility is an acknowledgement of this simple truth of life. Likewise, being respectful to a person who confesses his mistake is also a way of acknowledging that we ourselves can commit the same mistake. **See the story from the life of Swami Samarth Ramdas below.**
5. The fifth reason, as we shall see below in the story of Shabari, is that Bhagavān does not like people who are proud and arrogant.
6. Humility acknowledges the fact that Bhagavān is greater than us, and we are mere fraction of His power, wisdom and beauty. **See the story of Bhima and Hanuman below.**
7. Avatāras of Bhagavān, noble Queens and other great men have clearly demonstrated the virtue of humility and respect in their lives, and we should emulate them. **See the stories of Krishna, Queen Ahalyabai Holkar and President George Washington below.**
8. Humility does not degrade is. Instead, it makes us great and elevated. **See the story of Guru Arjan Dev below.**

Story: Adi Shankaracharya realizes that Bhagavān is in Everyone

Adi Shankaracharya (7th-8th century AD) is considered one of the greatest philosophers of Hindu Dharma. He taught us that the same Brahman or Supreme Being is the basis of the entire creation. But sometimes, even saints forget to practice the message that they teach to others!

One day, he was travelling on the outskirts of Varanasi (a city holy to Bhagavān Shiva) with his disciples, when a fierce looking Chandāla (an uncivilized and unclean person, considered to be an 'untouchable' in ancient India) accompanied by four mongrel dogs blocked his way. Shankaracharya looked at the Chandāla in disgust, and asked him to get out of his way.

The Chandāla replied, "Should I remove my unclean body, or should I remove out of your way the all-pervading Brahman, Who lives within my heart too?" Shankaracharya was taken aback by the reply, and he looked at the Chandāla in amazement. When he did so, Shankaracharya had a vision of none other than Shiva in that Chandāla. He saw that the four dogs were none other than the four holy Vedas (the divinely revealed scriptures of Hindus).

Indeed, Bhagavān Shiva had appeared Himself to teach Shankaracharya a lesson – that no matter how humble the other person is, we ought to treat him with respect because he too has Bhagavān residing within him. Shankaracharya bowed to the Chandāla, and asked for forgiveness. He then composed a beautiful hymn called the 'Maneeshapanchakam' in which he called the Chandāla his own Guru for making him realize the great spiritual truth about Brahman being in the entire creation.

Story: Swami Dayanand Saraswati acknowledges the Respect of a Poor Man

In the town of Anupshahar in Uttar Pradesh, India, a humble barber became a great admirer of Swami Dayanand Sarasvati. One day, the barber lovingly served a few rotis to the Swami, and said, in a trembling voice, "Swamiji, everyone considers me a low born, humble barber. I apologize for offering you this roti, even though I am an unclear person." There were about 20 Brahmanas sitting in the vicinity and they too remarked, "How can you eat a roti given by an unclean and low person like a barber?"

Swamiji smiled and said, "There is nothing unclean about this roti. It is made of wheat, just as a roti from any other person. Only that food is unclean which is purchased with ill-gotten money, or which

has contaminating stuff in it. I will definitely eat the roti offered by you."

This story shows how the humble and kind gesture of Swami Dayanand acknowledged that the Swami had respect for everyone in his heart, even for people who were regarded as lowly by the rest of the society.

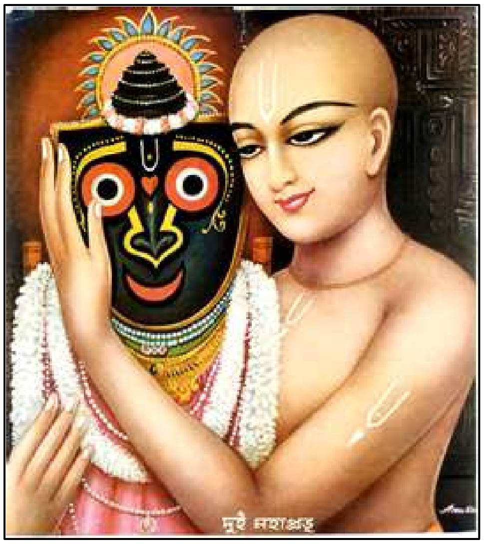
Story: The 'Ugly' image of Vishnu at the Jagannātha Temple of Puri:

The King of Kalinga (today the state of Odisha in India) constructed a grand temple to Jagganātha ('Lord of the Universe') Vishnu but it had no Mūrti in it. The King made an announcement, "I want a sculptor to car the most beautiful Mūrti of Vishnu to be carved. After the Mūrti is completed, I will inspect it. If I am pleased, the sculptor will be rewarded 10,000 gold coins. But if I am not happy with the work, the sculptor will be beheaded. I want all excellent sculptors to come forward to claim the reward."

No sculptor wanted to risk his life, and so one came forward to carve Vishnu's Mūrti. After several days, an old sculptor came forward but he put the condition, "I will need 30 days to carve the Mūrti. But during that period, I will work inside the Mandir with the doors closed. No one is allowed to open the doors till the work is completed, otherwise I will leave with my work unfinished." The King was glad, that at least someone had taken up the challenge, and he agreed to the sculptor's condition.

The sculptor entered the Mandir and shut the doors behind him. Day after day passed, and people outside could hear the sounds of chisel and hammer throughout the day. But some ministers grew suspicious and said, "We think that this sculptor is a fake. He must be a spy of the enemy King, and is actually knocking at the pillar so the Mandir from inside so that it collapses." The King of Kalinga ignored them, but one day, before the 30th day had passed, he could not control his curiosity. He ordered the doors of the Mandir to be opened. When everyone entered the Mandir, they were aghast to see an ugly, unfinished Mūrti of Vishnu lying on the floor, and the sculptor still working on it. The King was furious to see the ugly Mūrti and unsheathed his sword to behead the sculptor.

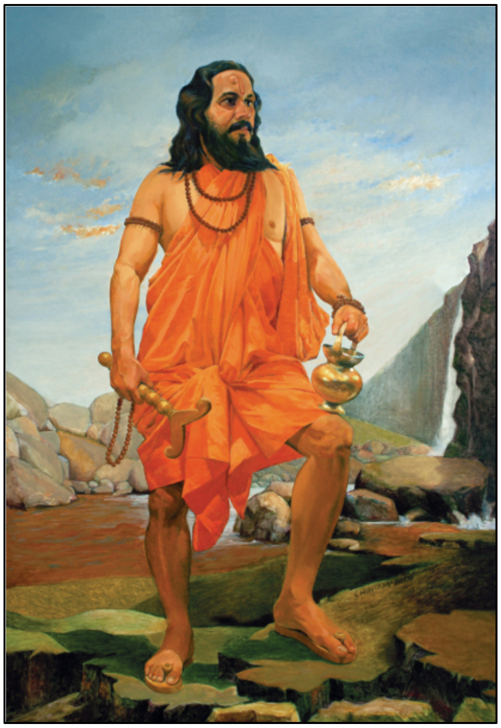
But the sculptor said, "King, you have broken your promise on the 21st day itself. I wanted you to go through this entire experience so that you understand that Vishnu resides inside the entire creation. Just as He is in beautiful Mūrtis, so also He is present in ugly ones too. Now, per my condition, I will leave this Mūrti unfinished and ugly, and urge you that this Mūrti alone should be worshipped in the Mandir! The beautiful Mūrti can be made afresh and placed somewhere else."



The King was aghast at the impertinence of the sculptor, and also at his own foolishness for breaking the promise that he had given to the sculptor. But when he looked at the sculptor again, a bigger surprise awaited him – the sculptor appeared to him in the beautiful four-armed form of Bhagavān Vishnu. The King learned his lesson – that beauty and ugliness lie in

the eye of the beholder, and Bhagavān is present everywhere, even in what we might consider as ugliness!

Story: Samarth Ramdas accepts the Mistakes of his Disciples



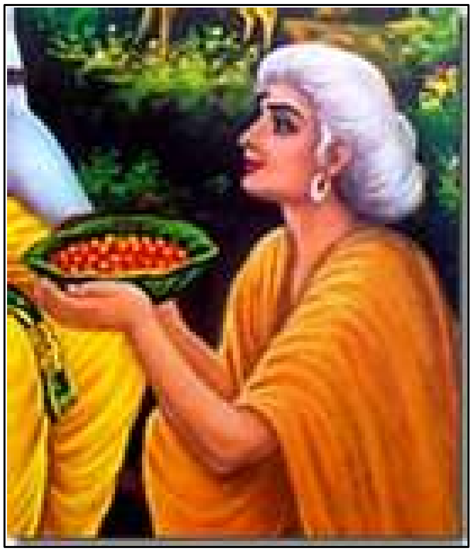
Emperor Shivaji (17th cent. CE) considered Swami Samarth Ramdas as his Guru. Once, his Guru was touring the country with his disciples when they all felt hungry. His disciples went to a farmer's field and cut out a few cobs of the jowar (a grain called 'sorghum' in English) for their food. When the farmers of that village saw them, they gathered and started beating all of them.

When Shivaji got the news, he became very angry and asked his Guru as to what punishment should be meted out to the farmers.

The Guru replied, "Do not give them any punishment. Instead gift them with a turban of honor because they rightly punished us for stealing food. They perhaps knew that I am your Guru, but that did not scare them from beating us. It was certainly the fault of my students that they went into a field uninvited and stole the cobs of jowar."

Story: The Humility of Shabari

Shabari was a humble and a simple tribal lady who lived in a hut close to the banks of the sacred lake Pampā. Many Rishis came every day to take a bath in that lake. Some of them looked at Shabari with contempt, thinking that she was a tribal woman, and therefore inferior to them. But Shabari did not feel bad at their attitude towards her. On the contrary, she would sweep the path leading to the lake everyday so that no thorn or stones hurt the feet of the Rishis when they went to take their bath in the lake.



One day, Shabari got a bit late and she was still sweeping the path when the Rishis came by to go to the lake. The Rishis who had contempt for Shabari started scolding her angrily for blocking their way. Shabari merely apologized to them with a lot of humility and respect, and went back to her hut. Bhagavān did not like the fact that the Rishis had humiliated Shabari, who was a great Bhakta, and a very humble lady. So, He changed the water of the lake into blood.

The Rishis were shocked to see the transformation of the water to blood. Bhagavān Rama then told the Rishis to seek

forgiveness of Shabari because only she could purify the lake again.

They went to the hut of Shabari and apologized profusely. Then, they requested her to come to the lake, and dip the big toe of her foot in the lake. Shabari accepted their apologies, and said that she was not worthy of being apologized to by the revered Rishis. Reluctantly, she went to the lake. As soon as she dipped the toe, the blood changed back to clear water! The Rishis got their lesson – the humble Bhakti of the tribal woman was clearly superior to their arrogant spiritual austerities in the eyes of Bhagavān.

Story: The Humility of Krishna

After the ninth day of the 18 day long Mahabharata war was over, Duryodhana stomped into Bheeshma's tent and alleged, 'Grandsire, everyone is saying that you are not fighting my enemies, the Pandavas with your whole strength because in your heart, you want them to win. I am just so disappointed with you!"

Bheeshma said, "Do not worry Duryodhana. What you have heard is not true. I promise that tomorrow, before the end of the day, I will get you the head of at least one Pandava." Duryodhana knew that Bheeshma always kept his word. So he went back to his army and conveyed the good news to them to boost their morale.

When the word reached the encampment of the Pandavas, Draupadi, their wife, grew really worried for the safety of her husbands. She prayed to Krishna, who immediately appeared in front of her and asked her to follow him in the dark to Bheeshma's tent. As they were walking towards the camp, Krishna said to her, "Draupadi, your shoes, to which some anklets are stitched, are making a lot of sound and will wake up everyone. Why don't you take them off here, and then enter that tent in front of us. That tent belongs to Bheeshma." Draupadi did as told and as soon as she entered the tent, she fell on the feet of Bheeshma. It was dark, and Bheeshma did not realize who it was. He automatically blessed the woman, "May you live a happy and long life with your husband." Draupadi was elated, and she said, "It is I, the son of your grandchildren, the Pandavas. I am happy that you have given me this blessing because now I am sure that you will spare all the five Pandavas!"

Bheeshma said, "I am sure it was Krishna's idea that you should come and get my blessing, so that I spare your husbands. But where is He?" Bheeshma lit up a lamp, and saw that Krishna was standing at the entrance of the tent. But something was dangling from his shoulders. Draupadi looked closely and was horrified, "Bhagavān, you should not have carried my shoes from the ground and slung them across your shoulders! We worship you and therefore, your act of picking my shoes with your hands and placing them on your shoulders will take me to hell."

Krishna smiled and said, 'Do not worry Draupadi, because I am always a servant of those Bhaktas like you who have surrendered themselves completely to me. I did not want any insect to get inside your sandals in the dark from the ground, and therefore I picked them up with my hands and put them across my shoulders."

Bheeshma was very moved when he noticed Krishna's humility. He replied, "When the Pandavas are protected by Bhagavān who will go to any extent to serve his Bhaktas, then there was no need for me to

give a blessing to the Pandavas. They were automatically protected by You." Bheeshma's words came true, and on the 10th day of the war, he fell, while fighting against the Pandavas.

Earlier, when he attended the Rājasūya ceremony in Indraprastha in honor of Emperor Yudhishthira, Duryodhana had been assigned the task of welcoming kings by washing their feet. But when the moment came, Duryodhana did not step forward thinking, "Why should I demean myself by washing the feet of our guests?" When Krishna saw Duryodhana's hesitation, He immediately came forward and washed the feet of the guests. Again, this shows Krishna to be a remarkably genuine and a humble person.

Story: The Humility of Queen Ahalyabai Holkar

Ahalyabai Holkar, the Pious and Humble Queen of Indore in central India, ruled the kingdom justly for almost 30 years (1767 – 1795). She had been widowed when her son was a minor and when her father in law was the King. At his deathbed, her father in law entrusted the kingdom in her hands, because he had full faith in her abilities.

Ahalyabai ruled her kingdom with great skill. Peace prevailed during her benign rule. Trade flourished and merchants and farmer in her kingdom became very rich. The queen repaired numerous old and crumbing temples not only in her own kingdom but in many other kingdoms. A widow herself, she opened a department in her government to ensure that widows in her kingdom were not deprived of their inheritance, and that they were able to take care of their own children. She spent the money from her treasury for opening schools for the poor, for constructing roads and for establishing rest-houses for travelers on the highways. Due to her charitable activities, people regarded her as a saint in her own lifetime.

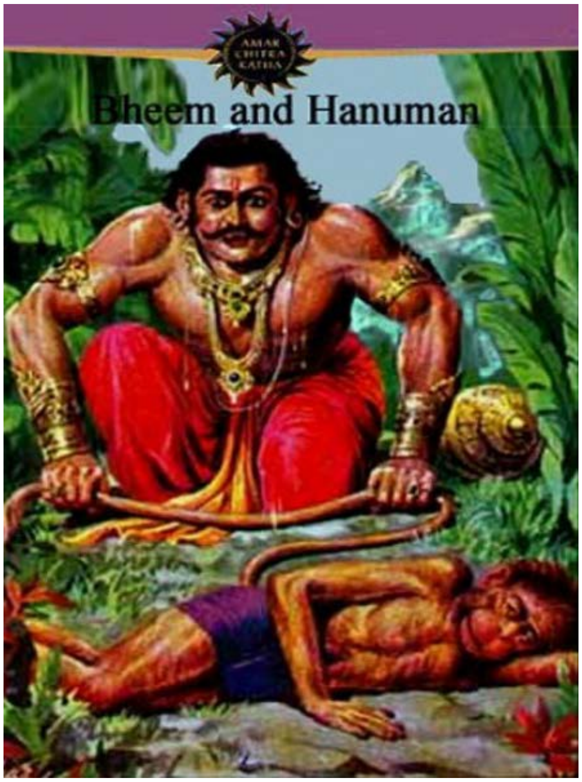
And yet, Ahalyabai lived a very simple and humble life as long as she lived. She did not live in her palace in the city of Indore. Instead, she moved to a location on Maheshwar, a pilgrimage center on the Narmada river, and carried out her administration from there. Once, two poor widows offered to give their entire wealth to her, saying that they had no use for it. But Ahalyabai declined to take it and asked them to use it for philanthropic activities instead. One day, a poet presented her with a book that had several poems in her praise. She just threw the book into the Narmada river. On another occasion, a famous painter approached her with a request to paint her picture. But she declined, saying that she would prefer that he made paintings depicting the Hindu Deities. Although she was the queen, she never wore any jewels or colorful expensive clothing. Instead, she always attired herself in the simple

white clothes of a Hindu widow, and was frequently seen carrying a small Shivalinga, to which she offered worship with a lot of Bhakti. Ahalyabai did not differentiate between the rich and the poor when they brought their complaints to her. She met even the poorest of the farmers personally and patiently listened to them.

The fame of this humble and pious ruler of the kingdom of Indore lasts even today. To perpetuate her memory, the citizens of the city of Indore instituted an award in her name. Her descendants have started a trust to perpetuate her philanthropic works up to this day.

Story: Bhīma learns a lesson in Humility from Hanumān

"One day, Princess Draupadi asked her husband Bhima to get an especially fragrant flower names Saugandhika. This was available only in a garden that was far away. Bhima went into the forest with his thunderous steps. The animals were perturbed and ran in all directions.



Hanuman, who was meditating on Rama, opened his eyes. He realized who it was, but just to teach Bhima a lesson he said, "Come and join me. Let us eat some fruits. You cannot go any further. This is my forest." Bhima without realizing who it was, replied, 'Who are you to prevent me from going? Move aside, or you will face the consequences." Hanuman answered in a humble tone, "I am an old monkey. I can hardly move. Just move aside my tail and proceed."

Bhima pushed the tail with his feet. It did not budge. Surprised, he tried lifting it with one hand. Still there was no result. Bhima tried the move the tail with all his tail and failed. His pride was humbled. He now fell at the feet of the monkey.

Hanuman revealed his true identity as his older brother and embraced Bhima. He then directed Bhima to the garden, and Bhima was able to collect the fragrant flowers. But he had also learned the important lesson of humility on his route."[38]

Story: The Humility of George Washington

"A group of soldiers was trying to lift a large piece of timber. The corporal stood by the side, commanding the men to heave harder

[38] Page 25 in Purnavidya, vol 6 (Guidelines for teaching)

to lift the timber. A stranger rode by on his horse and observed the scene.

He said to the corporal, "Don't you think if you helped them, the strength of one more man might help them lift the timber? Why don't you help them?"

The corporal replied, "That is not my job. I am the corporal. It is for them to do that work. That is not the work of a corporal!"

With that, the stranger dismounted from his horse, joined the ranks of the soldiers and helped them to lift the timber. The added strength of one man was all it took to lift the wood. Having completed the task, the stranger mounted his horse. Before departing he turned to the corporal and said, "The next time you have a piece of timber you need help lifting, corporal, call for the commander-in-chief."

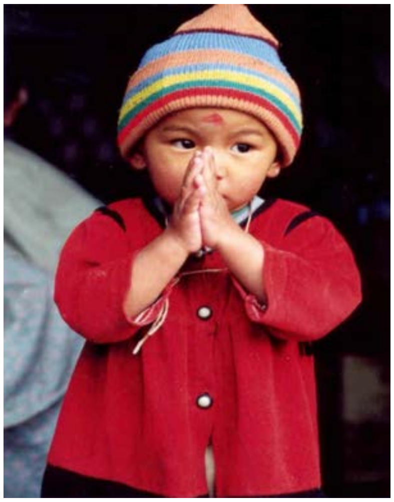
It was then that the men realized that the stranger was none other than George Washington, the first President of the United States, the commander-in-chief of the army."[39]

Story: Guru Arjan Dev constructs the Loftiest Mandir in Amritsar

The fifth Sikh Guru Shri Arjan Dev decided to construct a beautiful Mandir at the center of a pond called Ramseur in Amritsar in northern India. His disciples came to him and said, "Guru-ji, this Mandir should be the tallest building in the area. This will signify its importance."

The Guru smiled and said, "There is no need to have a tall building for the Mandir. It is only a fruit laden tree whose branches bow." And so, the Harimandir was constructed and its height was kept low. When the Mandir was completed, Guru Arjan Dev composed a hymn comparing the Mandir in the middle of lake to Hari (Vishnu) lying on the Sheshanāga in the ocean of milk.

32.3 The Meaning of 'NAMASTE'



Bhagavan is present inside all of us. He is inside you. He is inside me. He is inside animals. He is inside plants. He is also present inside rocks. He is in the sky, the oceans, in the sun and in the moon. Therefore, we should love and respect everyone. If we love others, we love the Bhagavan Who is inside them. And when we are mean to others, we are being mean to the Bhagavan Who is inside them. When we meet someone, we should greet each other by bowing our

[39] Rajinder Singh, p. 65-66

head, folding our hands and saying ‘**Namaste**’. See the picture on the left to see how we say ‘**Namaste**’.

Namaste means – “I respect and love the God who is inside you.”

Whenever you meet your Uncles and Aunts, your grandparents and other elders, you should do **Namaste** to them like the child in this picture. When you wake up in the morning, go and say ‘**Namaste**’ to your parents. And when you go to the **Mandir**, you should do a **Namaste** in front of every Form of Bhagavan. This means that Bhagavan is also present inside the **Murti**. Namaste is the **Hindu** way of greeting others.

32.3 Discussion: Is Humility the same as ‘Under-Selling?”

This world is a very competitive place. Whether you are applying for a job, or for admission to a prestigious college, you compete with many other applicants. Suppose you fill out an application to a college program and you meet and exceed all their requirements for applicants. You want to maximize your chances of admission and therefore focus on all your achievements, experiences and skills that you think the college would like to see in their students. Does this mean that you are not being humble in your application? [**Hint:** ‘Under-selling’ means not highlighting your true skills adequately. Humility means no exaggerating your abilities and not lying about having skills that you really do not have.]

33. Charity

33.1 What is Charity?

Charity means sharing what you have earned lawfully and ethically with others. Charity is praised as one of the greatest virtues in Hindu Dharma. Hindu prayers ask our Devas to melt the hearts of misers and selfish people so that they share their wealth with others:

> O Deva Pushan! Urge even him to give, who does not want to give. Melt even the mind of the miser so that he gives. **Rigveda 6.53.3**

33.2 Why should we give charity?

1. **Because Bhagavān gives us those very things that we share with others:**

We can give many types of gifts, and each type of gift brings its own benefit to the recipient and reward to the donor. When one practices charity, he does not become poorer due to the loss of his possessions (that he has given away). Rather, he becomes richer because his act of donation brings him material rewards as well as earns him religious merit in future lives. In fact, the philanthropist donor often gets those very things as reward that he had donated to the needy person:

> *Lord Rama said to Lakshmana*: "Truly it is said that what is not given by us will not be enjoyed by us in the future!" ***Bhavishya Purana 4.169.6***
>
> "I (God) abandon that person who eats before sharing his food with others. But I never forsake that person who gives food to the hungry before eating himself. I am the Lord of all food (annadevata). I take away the food of him who eats without giving; and I nurture and give food in plenty to that person who considers giving food as important as feeding himself." ***Yajurveda (Taittiriya Brahmana 2.8.8.3)***
>
> He who saves the life of a troubled person obtains three fruits of charity (Dharma, Artha and Kaama). But he who gifts knowledge obtains a greater fruit. **Atri Samhita 1.337**
>
> The donor of clothes gets bedecked with beautiful clothes himself. The donor of silver acquires a good experience, whereas the donor of gold attains a long life and great wealth. **Samvartta Smriti 52**
>
> The person who exerts considerably to procure firewood for a needy person in the cold season obtains physical vigor, wisdom, good appearance and good fortune. **Samvartta Smriti 58**
>
> He who gives medicine, Ghee and food to the sick; and mixes these to offer to the sick attains a good health, happiness and a long life. **Samvartta Smriti 59**

2. Because we can Compensate for our Evil Deeds by giving Charity

Hindu scriptures count giving charity as a means of canceling out the taint of sins done earlier:

> One should give charity to destroy his sins. If a person desires to obtain imperishable religious merit, he should give to others those very things as gifts that he himself desires or likes. **Samvartta Smriti 45**

3. Because not sharing our Possessions is Evil Behavior

Not practicing charity, not giving alms to the needy and not helping out others is not a neutral act. Rather, he who does not do good to others actually gets tainted with sin.

> "The food of that person who does not share it with others is a waste indeed. I truly say this, that his food becomes his death, not his life. A miser neither feeds the hungry guest, nor does he offer food to God. Eating for himself alone, he becomes a consumer of sin alone!" ***Rigveda 10.117.6***
>
> That atithi (guest) who arrives at one's home with expectation, but is turned away disappointed, takes the religious merit of the householder to whose house he had come, and leaves behind for him his own tainting evil deeds. **Vishnu Dharma Sutra 67.33**
>
> Beggars roaming the streets, naked, grief-stricken, rough and armed with broken bowls point out to the world that the fruits the non-charitable persons reap are like these. **Garuda Purāṇa 1.109.24.**

The story of King Shveta below shows how a person who does not give alms suffers after his death.

33.3 What is a good time to do Charity?

It is never too late to help out a needy person, and no time is inappropriate to give help a needy person when he really needs our help:

> Whether an atithi arrives in the morning or in the evening, the host should offer him a seat and water, as well as food to the best of his ability after paying him customary respect. **Vishnu Dharma Sutra 67.45**

33.4 Who is deserving of our Charity?

Many of us share our belongings with our friends and family who are not in need (or who are not poor) and think that we have done charity. But, this is not charity.

> Donating to someone who is one's own is not called charity. It is merely a form of fulfilling one's social obligations and does not bestow any social merit to the donor. ***Vyāsa Smriti 4.27b***

Charity is that which is given to the following worthy recipients:

> Exert for the welfare of people of noble families, for the poor, for the scholars of Vedas, for the contended (who do not ask for anything), for the humble, and for all creatures. **Brihaspati Smriti 57**
>
> Mother, father, teacher, wife, children, poor, dependents, one who has fallen upon difficult times, an atithi and the sacred fire – these constitute the category of 'those who ought to be taken care of'. **Daksha Smriti 2.33**
> One's clan, companions, disabled or injured, orphans, dependents and other poor, these are also included in this category. **Daksha Smriti 2.34**
> The householder should cook for all creatures and feed learned scholars. Not doing so causes him to go to Hell. **Daksha Smriti 2.35**
> Therefore, he who desires his own progress should always give alms to the poor, the orphans and distinguished persons (such as scholars etc.); for he who does not give alms to these lives on the fate of others (i.e., on the good will of others, so to speak). **Daksha Smriti 2.39**

It is quite useless to give charity to a rich man because he has not use for it, just like no one administers medicine to a healthy person.

> A downpour in the ocean is unnecessary; feeding an over-fed and satiated man is superfluous; a charity made over to an affluent man is unnecessary and the meritorious actions of a base man are futile. **Garuda Purāṇa 1.115.75.**

33.5 What are the different grades of Charity?

Charity can be done in many ways, and all charity is not the same. The Gita therefore grades charity into three classes. The Sāttvik being the best, and the Tāmasic being the worst:

> A gift that is given, knowing it to be a duty, at the proper place and time, to a worthy person, without any expectation in return, is held to be Sattvic. **Gita 17.20**
>
> A gift that is given with a view to receiving in return, or looking for fruit again, or reluctantly, is considered Rajasic. **Gita 17.21**
>
> A gift given at the wrong place and time, to unworthy persons, without respect, or with insult, is called Tamasic. **Gita 17.22**
>
> "A noble man makes a gift of charity respectfully and without publicity. Mean men also practice charity, but they are guided by selfish motives and give away with disrespect." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya**

A charity that is given in expectation of something is not true charity. It is merely a form of a business transaction.

33.6 How much should we give in Charity?

Giving at least something is better than giving nothing. But there is not much merit in off-loading useless and extra stuff from your home. Good charity is one in which the giver donates things that are precious and dear to him. A good donor gives till it hurts him. But at the same time, our scriptures forbid us from giving away all our wealth in charity. The reason for this is that "charity begins at home." We have our children, spouse, elderly parents etc., who are dependent on us and they have the first right on our wealthy. Only after providing for them can we go ahead and give the rest away in charity.

The stories of Karna, King Rantideva and the Golden Mongoose below are very instructive in this connection.

33.7 How should we give?

The verses from the Bhagavad Gita cited above clearly say that we should give with respect and dignity. The Upanishads further say-

> "Give with faith. Do not give without faith. Give in plenty. Give with modesty. Give with fear (knowing that not giving charity is a sin). Give with sympathy." **Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11**

The story of Dokka Sitamma below is an example of a noble lady who practiced charity in this manner.

33.8 Is giving Charity always a good thing?

Giving charity to evil people, knowing very well that they will use the alms that they have collected for evil purposes is not the right thing to do. The giver of such a charity gets bad Karma. Therefore, we should always try to do a background check on the person who asks us for help.

Secondly, we should not give charity if it is promoting laziness, a feeling of entitlement and laziness in the society. A normal person feels a bit humiliated while asking for help. And if there is a persistent line of people who need help, then there is something written in the entire society which has created a huge group of beggars. **The story of King Bali and Yudhishthira below shows how one should try to help people become financially independent (so that they do not have to keep asking for help) instead of just giving to them whenever they come begging.**

Stories on Charity

Story: The Superiority of Karna's Charity

One day, Arjuna complained to Krishna, "Even though I am your friend, you always praise Karna for his charity, Don't I too help and give to people whenever they come and ask?" Krishna merely replied, "Yes, you are my friend. But I do not think that you can match Karna's ability to give charity."

At that moment, a distraught Brahmana came there and said, "Sirs, my wife has just died, and I need some sandalwood to cremate her." Arjuna sent his servants to get some sandalwood from their stores, but they returned to inform him that they had run out of sandalwood. Arjuna turned to the Brahmana and said, "I am sorry, we do not have any sandalwood to give to you." The Brahmana replied, "That is fine, I will go to Karna and get some from him." Arjuna got irritated, and decided to follow the Brahmana along with Krishna.

At Karna's palace, the Brahmana got the same answer. But just as he was about to leave, with a sullen heart, Karna shouted at him, "Wait, the support beams of my palace are made of sandalwood." And as everyone watched aghast, Karna chopped off the beams of a section of his palace, causing that section to collapse. He gave the sandalwood to the poor Brahmana, who praised Karna for his magnanimity. Arjuna now felt sheepish, and Krishna said to him, "Now you know why I always praise Karna for his philanthropy. He who wants to give will always figure out a way how to give to a needy person."

Story: The Charity of Dokka Sitamma (1841-1909 CE)

The holy city of Varanasi is said to be blessed by Annapurna Devi, a manifestation of Devi Parvati who gives food to humanity. It is believed by the Hindus that due to Her blessing, no one will ever go hungry in Varanasi. In the temple of Annapurna Devi in that city, there is also a picture of Dokka Sitamma, a philanthropic widow who lived barely 100 years ago.

Dokka Sitamma was widowed at a young age, even before she and her husband had any children. She lived all alone in her hut, located in a fertile district in the coastal area of the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. She had inherited several acres of fertile land on which were grown crops of various kinds.

Every day, she would cook a lot of food and send out a call for whosever wanted to join her for food. She was sensitive enough to understand that the poor and hungry people are sometimes too embarrassed to beg for food.

But when she invited all to her door, they felt welcomed to arrive and leave after filling their stomachs. She served food to everyone who was hungry, without regard to whether they were rich or poor, of high or of a low social status, man or woman. This went on for a few decades. Meanwhile, her greedy neighbors and relatives gradually robbed her of the land that she owned. Her wealth went on decreasing day by day. But still, she lovingly continued to call people over for food every day.

So lovingly she fed everyone that those who benefited from her generosity started narrating miraculous stories about her. Someone reported that a person who ate from her hands was cured of some disease. Another person said that he bore enmity towards his family member, but after eating her food, the feelings of enmity and hatred disappeared from his mind. Sitamma continued to feed the poor for a few decades till she became very old, and very poor. She decided that she would now use her remaining money to travel to Varanasi, more than 1000 miles away, for pilgrimage. She also hoped to die in that city, a dream for all pious Hindus.

She hired a cart with a driver and bullocks and set out for Varanasi. A few miles from her home however, when the cart stopped for the night, she heard a family comprising of a couple and their hungry children at the rest-house. The man was saying to his children, “I know you have not eaten today. But I have no money. Let us wait till tomorrow. We will reach Sitamma’s home and she will surely have some food to share.” The children were really hungry and started crying.

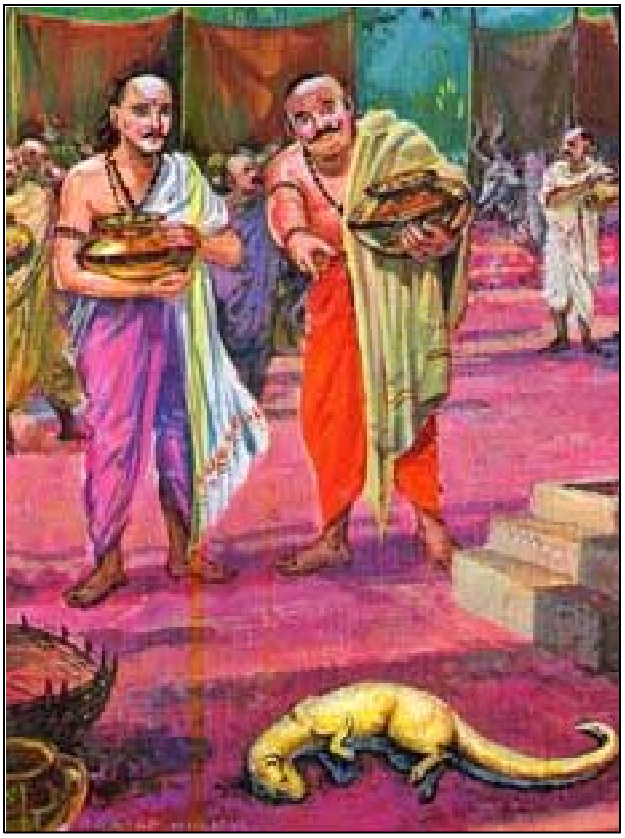
Sitamma immediately woke up the driver and commanded him to rush the cart back to her house. The driver protested, but to no avail! The following day, the family arrived, and Sitamma had food ready for them. She had abandoned her trip to Varanasi, realizing that there were people who needed her. But there was something greater that she had sacrificed – her self-respect. She had used up all her money for the trip and had nothing left to buy food. To save the hungry family of the embarrassment of begging, she had gone to her neighbor’s home and begged for some food for them!

When Sitamma passed away in her hut, it is said that a bolt of lightning arose through the roof of her hut, and disappeared in the skies. In the Hindu tradition, this is treated as a sign that the person who had died was a great soul. Sitamma surely was one, and a jewel of the Hindu society. Today, she is considered an Avatāra of Devi Annapūrṇā and her picture is worshipped in Her shrine in Varanasi.

Story: The Golden Mongoose (Mahabharata 14.92-93)

After the great battle of Mahābhārata was over, the victorious Pandava brothers organized a grand and costly Vedic ritual ceremony called the Ashvamedha. At the end of this ceremony, King Yudhishthira gave costly gifts to the priests, and donated very large quantities of food, gold, cattle and other forms of wealth to the poor and needy. Everyone praised the King for his generosity and hailed him as one of the greatest Kings who had ever lived.

Suddenly, there appeared a strange mongoose at the site of the Vedic ritual. Half the body of that mongoose was golden in color, and the other half was normal brown. And to even greater surprise, the mongoose said in a human voice – “This Vedic ritual is definitely not as great as the gift of that Brahmana in Kurukshetra.”



Everyone was surprised on hearing this, because the King had spent a lot of money in his own Ashvamedha ceremony, and had donated a lot of food and money. They asked the mongoose to explain his statement. The mongoose then narrated this story –

"Long, long ago, there lived a poor Brahmana with his wife, son and his pregnant daughter in law in Kurukshetra. One year, the land was stuck with a terrible famine and there was no food for anyone to eat. The poor Brahmana somehow got just enough flour to make four Rotis. As they all started to eat one Roti each, a hungry beggar appeared at the doorstep and asked for food in a very piteous voice. The Brahmana, though hungry himself, offered his Roti to the beggar. But the beggar's hunger was not satisfied and he requested for some more food.

The Brahmana's wife thought that it is the duty of a good woman to support her husband and help him in following Dharma. Therefore, she too gave her Roti to the beggar. But the beggar's hunger was still not satisfied. Now, the Brahmana's son gave his Roti to the beggar, saying that a good son must always support his parents in practicing Dharma. Even after eating three Rotis, the beggar was still not satisfied and asked if he could have some more food. Now, the pregnant daughter in law came forward, offering him her own Roti. The Brahmana protested and said that she could not give her food because she was pregnant and therefore must take care of the baby inside her. But the daughter in law said that according to the Vedas, we should see God in our guests, and therefore guests must be served. She argued that her unborn child will also get the benefit of her charity to the beggar, and therefore she will give her own share of food to the beggar.

As soon as she gave the Roti to the beggar, his hunger got satisfied. But all the four family members, tired and weak from hunger, fell dead. A miracle happened however. The beggar was none other than the Lord of Dharma in disguise. Pleased with the generosity of the Brahmana and his family for giving all of their food even though they were themselves dying of hunger, he brought all of them back to life and took all of them to Heaven in a divine chariot."

The mongoose then said –

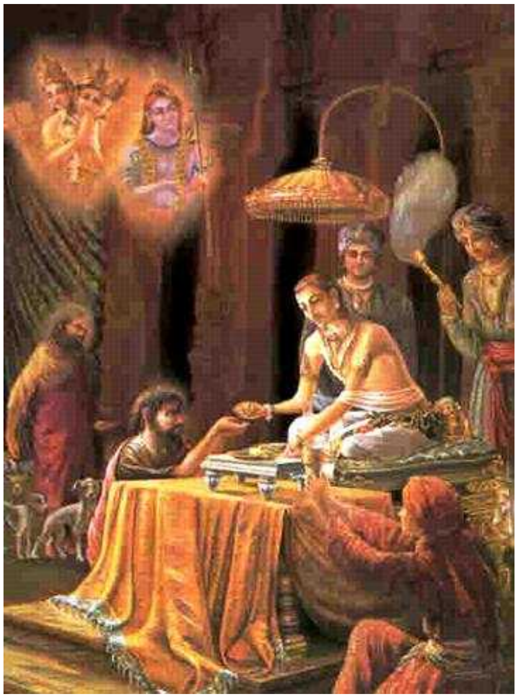
"I happened to be in the kitchen of that Brahmana, watching all this. I happened to roll on the floor of the kitchen. The particles of flour that the kind Brahmana had used to make the Rotis rubbed against my skin and turned it golden. But there was only just enough particles to make only half of my skin golden. Since then, I have been roaming all over the world to find someone who is as kind and generous as that

Brahmana and his family, so that I can rub the other half of my body against their food and turn my entire body golden. Unfortunately, I still have not found someone as great as that Brahmana of Kurukshetra and his family."

Upon hearing this, King Yudhishthira and his brothers were humbled. Even though they had given away millions in charity, they gave all this money from the billions that they had. Whereas, that poor Brahmana and his family had given all the food they had quietly and without complaining, even though they were themselves dying of hunger. The Pandava brothers realized that that charity is greatest in which we give away something that is irreplaceable and unique, something that is really dear to us. Not just something that we have extra with us.

Story: The Kindness of King Rantideva:

Once, there was a famine in the kingdom of King Rantideva. The King was a man of great compassion. He would donate to the needy whatever food and possessions he and his family acquired. Therefore, they lived a life of great poverty and suffering for the sake of others. Once, he gave all his food in charity and did not get to eat anything for 48 days. On the 49th day, as was starving to death, he somehow obtained some delicious food containing milk, ghee and sugar and some water to drink. Just then, a poor and hungry Brahmana arrived at his doorstep and asked him for food. Rantideva saw God Vishnu in all living beings, and therefore offered him some food with respect, as if he were feeding God Himself. When the Brahmana left, Rantideva divided the remainder of the food amongst his family members and himself. Just as he was about to eat, a Shūdra arrived at his doorstep, asking for food. Rantideva remembered God Vishnu, and again fed the Shudra from his own portion of the food as if the Shudra were the Lord Himself. Now, a Chandāla arrived with his dogs and asked Rantideva for food too. Out of compassion, and thinking that God Vishnu resides in all living beings, Rantideva gave all the remaining food to them. Now Rantideva was left only with water and was just about to drink it when a thirsty low caste person arrived at his doorstep and begged him piteously for some water. Rantideva forgot his own thirst and hunger and was filled with compassion and love. He said –



"'I do not desire from the Supreme Controller the attainment of the eight perfections [siddhis], nor do I ask for the cessation of a repeated birth; I accept all hardship in my stay among all the living beings so that they may become free from suffering. I am freed from all the hunger, thirst, fatigue and a shaky body, as also from the poverty, distress, lamentation, depression and bewilderment, with my handing over my water to maintain the life of this poor soul desiring to stay alive!" (Bhagavata Purana 9.21.12-13)[40]

[40] http://www.srimadbhagavatam.org/canto9/chapter21.html - Text 13#Text 13

Saying these kind words, even though dying of thirst himself, Rantideva gave his water to the thirsty low-caste man.

As he did this, the Devas manifested before Rantideva to honor him for his supreme sacrifice, for his compassion and love for ALL living creatures. Rantideva gave all that he had, not just for the sake of Brahmana, but even for the Chandāla and his dogs and for the Shudra. Even though he was dying of thirst, he gave the only water he had to another thirsty man, even though that man was of a low caste. This is because Rantideva equally saw God Vishnu in all living creatures, and he put their suffering and pain before his. Not caring for his own material progress, Rantideva cared only for Lord Vishnu. Thinking always of Lord Vishnu, he served without any selfish motive anyone who asked for help. And therefore, Rantideva is considered the best of the Yogis, and the best of the devotees of Lord Vishnu.

Story: King Shveta has to eat Garbage:

Once, Sage Agastya was meditating at the bank of a beautiful lake in a forest. Suddenly, he saw a mysterious sight. A chariot descended from heaven and landed on the waters of the lake. In the chariot was a king, who was dressed in beautiful clothes and jewels. He was being served by apsaras (divine dancers) who entertained him with their singing and dancing. After the magical chariot landed on the water, the king got off from it and started walking on the water of the lake towards a heap of garbage on the other side of the shore. The Sage was shocked to see that the king started eating that garbage hungrily.

Curious, the Sage approached the king and asked him- "Why are you eating this garbage to satisfy your hunger? It appears that you live in heaven, and have a beautiful chariot to travel, and many beautiful apsaras to entertain you. Can't you afford to get good food from somewhere else? Don't they give you enough food in heaven? Why do you have to come down to the earth to eat this garbage?"

The king replied – "Respected Sage, let me tell you the story of how I was forced to eat this garbage. When I was a human being living on this earth, I was a good King named Shveta. I took care of all my subjects, punished evil-doers and made sure that everyone in my kingdom was happy. Whatever I owned, I would try to donate or use for my worship. But I never donated any food because I loved to eat. I thought – "Let me keep this food for myself. I am already donating other things. So there is no need for me to donate food now." When I died, my soul was taken to heaven because I had been a very good and spiritual person. But God Brahmā decided that I will not get to eat any food in heaven because I had never shared my own food with others. I had never given any food to the hungry and poor. So God said to me – "When you feel hungry, you will have to go to the earth. There you will get only garbage to eat. You can enjoy only those things that you had shared on the earth with others when

you were alive there. But when you meet Sage Agastya, you will be freed of this curse of eating garbage. After that, when you return to heaven, you can start eating all the delicious things that are available there."

The king then said to the Sage – "Holy Sage Agastya, I have realized my mistake now. I have understood that we should not be stingy in sharing anything that we have with others. In fact, we should share with others whatever is dear to us. Please convey my message to everyone that whatever we share with others, the same things alone will be given to us after we die. If we do not share any particular thing with others, that very thing will not be given to us in the future."

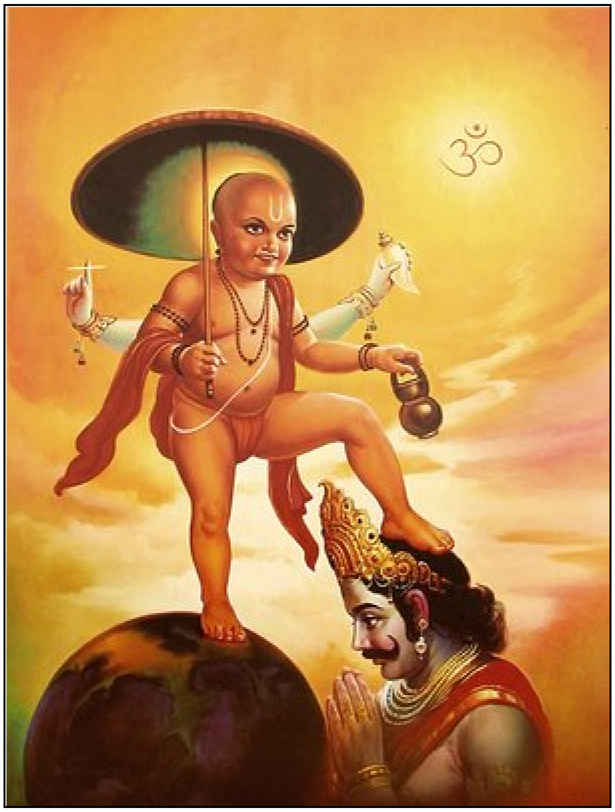
Sage Agastya blessed him for the wonderful teaching. He freed the king of the curse, as God had promised. The king then ate the garbage for the one last time, and then flew back to heaven in his chariot.

Moral of the Story: If we do not share our food with the needy, we will ourselves suffer hunger in the future.

Source: Vālmīki Rāmāyana, Uttarakānda chapters 77-78

Story: King Bali Mocks King Yudhishthira for Donating Food:

After the Pandavas defeated the Kauravas in the great war of Mahabharata, Yudhishthira was crowned as the king of Hastinapura. To celebrate his victory, he organized a great ceremony called the Ashwamedha Yajna. During the ceremony, King Yudhishthira gave a lot of money by way of charity to the Brahmanas, and all other members of his society. Every day while the ceremony was on, thousands of people came to eat in the feast organized by him for free.



Yudhishthira said to Krishna – "See, so many people are benefitting from my generosity." Krishna realized that Yudhishthira was becoming a little proud of his good actions of donating money and food. So he said – "King Yudhishthira, while I appreciate your good actions, I want you to meet someone who gifts even more food and money than you." Now, Yudhishthira was really eager to meet someone who according to Krishna was even more generous than he himself was! So they went

below the surface of the earth, where King Bali was meditating.

When King Bali ended his meditation, he noticed the arrival of his guests and bowed to Lord Krishna, asking him to introduce the other guest to him. Lord Krishna said – "King Bali, this is King Yudhishthira of Hastinapura.. He is a very generous king who feeds thousands of Brahmanas, soldiers, farmers and others every day."

Upon hearing this, King Bali suddenly looked horrified and he said – "Forgive me Lord, but I do not want to hear any praise of King Yudhishthira. I do not think he is doing a good thing by distributing money for free and giving food to thousands of people every day without any reason. If even the Brahmanas in his kingdom are dependent on him for food, then I am scared to think of the condition of other sections of his society who must be even more lazy or must be even poorer."

Lord Krishna smiled, because King Yudhishthira had learned his lesson. He said to King Yudhishthira – "One gives medicine to a person only when he is sick. Likewise, money and food should be given only to the poor, not to the rich. We should certainly help those who are sick and poor. But we should not just give food and money to people free all the time because then they will become lazy and will never work."

34. Seva

What is Seva?

Seva means helping others by doing volunteer work. We should help our parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters and anyone else who wants our help. When we do **seva**, we should have a smile on our face. We should never ask for money or a gift when we help others. Seva is a special type of charity in which we donate our time and labor, and not necessarily a material good or money.

Doing Seva is good Karma. Bhagavān acknowledges and likes people who do Seva. In the modern society, Seva or voluntary service is needed to run many charitable institutions, temples, old age homes etc. These institutions do not have enough money to pay everyone whose services are needed, and therefore they rely on free voluntary services of their volunteers.

STORY: BHAGAVAN KRISHNA CLEANS DIRTY DISHES:

Yudhishthira was the king of Indraprastha. His friends advised him to perform the ceremony called Rajasuya. After performing this ceremony, they said, Yudhishthira would become the king of the whole of India.

Invitations were sent to all the kings of India to attend the ceremony and they were asked to come with presents for Yudhishthira. Lord Krishna, who was the king of faraway Dwaraka in western India, also came. Everyone wanted to do some **seva** in the grand-function. Lord Krishna also requested for some work to do.

But he had come from a long distance and was the last one to arrive. The only duty that he could get was cleaning the kitchen after the feast was over. Everyone requested Krishna not to worry about doing this dirty job. They said that servants could take care of cleaning the kitchen. However, Krishna insisted that he too wanted to help and would be pleased to do this dirty job.

According to tradition, all the guests had to select a chief guest among them. This chief guest had to be someone who was a very good person. The chief guest would put the crown of the Emperor of India on the head of king Yudhishthira. Everyone thought that Lord Krishna was the greatest of all the guests in the program. Therefore he was appointed as the chief guest for the entire ceremony.

After the program was over and Yudhishthira had been crowned as the Indian emperor, everyone decided to take

some rest. However, Krishna, the chief guest, was nowhere to be found.

When people went out to look for him, they found him in the main hall, where he was picking up dirty dishes and carrying them to the kitchen for cleaning.

Everyone was very moved to see how Lord Krishna kept his word. Even though Krishna was the chief guest and is the greatest of all, he performed his duty very humbly. Most people would have thought that picking dirty dishes and clean them was a dirty task which only humble servants should perform. But our Lord Krishna clearly thought the opposite!

Lord Krishna demonstrated that no task is lowly and that we should carry out whatever ***seva*** *has been assigned to us. Remember that work is worship. If Krishna could clean dishes after everyone had eaten, we too should follow his example and clean not just ours but also our family's and friends' dishes after they have finished their food.*

Further Reading: Indian Man Single-Handedly Plants Entire Forest[41]

A little over 30 years ago, a teenager named Jadav "Molai" Payeng began burying seeds along a barren sandbar near his birthplace in northern India's Assam region to grow a refuge for wildlife. Not long after, he decided to dedicate his life to this endeavor, so he moved to the site where he could work full-time creating a lush new forest ecosystem. Incredibly, the spot today hosts a sprawling 1,360 acre of jungle that Payeng planted single-handedly.

The Times of India recently caught up with Payeng in his remote forest lodge to learn more about how he came to leave such an indelible mark on the landscape:

It all started way back in 1979 when floods washed a large number of snakes ashore on the sandbar. One day, after the waters had receded, Payeng, only 16 then, found the place dotted with the dead reptiles. That was the turning point of his life. "The snakes died in the heat, without any tree cover. I sat down and wept over their lifeless forms. It was carnage. I alerted the forest department and asked them if they could grow trees there. They said nothing would grow there. Instead, they asked me to try growing bamboo. It was painful, but I did it. There was nobody to help me. Nobody was interested," says Payeng, now 47.

While it's taken years for Payeng's remarkable dedication to planting to receive some well-deserved recognition internationally, it didn't take long for wildlife in the region to benefit from the manufactured forest. Demonstrating a keen understanding of ecological balance, Payeng even transplanted ants to his burgeoning ecosystem to bolster its natural harmony. Soon the shadeless sandbar was transformed into a self-functioning environment where a menagerie of creatures could dwell. The forest, called the Molai woods, now serves as a safe haven for numerous birds, deer, rhinos, tigers, and elephants — species increasingly at risk from habitat loss elsewhere.

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[41] Source: http://www.care2.com/causes/indian-man-single-handedly-plants-entire-forest.html#ixzz1sCqa0hrD

Despite the conspicuousness of Payeng's project, Forestry officials in the region first learned of this new forest in 2008 — and since then they've come to recognize his efforts as truly remarkable, but perhaps not enough. "We're amazed at Payeng," says Assistant Conservator of Forests, Gunin Saikia. "He has been at it for 30 years. Had he been in any other country, he would have been made a hero."

Example of a Child who does Seva versus one who doesn't

Let us see below two boys. One of the boys loves to do **Seva**. The other boy does not like to do any **Seva**.

35. Unity and Cooperation

35.1 Unity & Cooperation

This section on Unity illustrates how we should forget our petty differences and work as a team to achieve common goals.

No man is an island unto himself that is totally aloof from everyone else, and it takes a whole village to raise a child. Everyone has unique gifts and we should utilize them to achieve our common goals. As a proverb goes in Hindu scriptures –

> "There is no root that has no medicinal value. There is no person who does not have even a single good quality. But rare is that human being who knows how to put all of them to some good use." ***Shukranitisāra***

While playing sports too, each team member has to forget his ego and selfishness and play his role to the best extent possible so that his team wins the game. In football for instance, the offense, defense, quarter-back etc., all have to do their respective roles in perfect coordination and mutual understanding. If there is a lack of team spirit, even the best quarter-back cannot make that team win!

The Hindu tradition records the inspiring story of how Bhagavan Rama collected a team of totally mismatched creatures – beer, monkeys and other apes, and even a little squirrel to complete the most astounding feat – construction of a bridge across the ocean from India to Sri Lanka for the purpose of rescuing Devi Sita. Every member of Rama's army played their respective role. The story a few pages later illustrates the role played by the little squirrel in completing the bridge.

35.2 The Six Enemies – How do they prevent Unity & Cooperation?

What is it that prevents us from working united as a team? One of the main reasons is the presence of the six internal enemies. This may be illustrated with the help of the following example:

The enemy	***How it prevents Unity***
Kāma (Desire, Lust)	I'd rather help that pretty woman.
Krodha (anger)	He had hurt me in the past, so why should I help him now?
Lobha (greed)	Why should I help if there is nothing in it for me? My share of the rewards for the help that will give is no enough and I want more.
Moha (delusion, attachment)	It is his work, so why should I help him? It is not my work.
Mada (Arrogance, ego, pride)	I can do this alone and I have no need of weak people like him.
Mātsarya (jealousy)	He will take all the credit for our success if I help him.

35.3 Scriptural Quotes on Unity & Relevant Stories (Below)

I. Fight the Battle of Life Together:

The stream (of life) filled with stones (obstacles) flows on. Move forward together. Stand erect, and cross over my friends! Let us leave here those who are opposed to good; and let us cross over to the powers that are beneficent. **Rigveda 10.53.8**

Read the story, "How the bridge to Lanka was built."

II. BENEFITS OF UNITY

Just like the honey bees unite against the person who tries to steal honey from their beehive and kill him, in the same way even a united group of weak men can defeat a strong enemy. **Mahabharata 3.33.70**

Read the story, "How the Parrots defeated the Bird Catcher."

If a stout and sturdy tree, with deep roots and a giant stature stands alone, he can be uprooted and smashed to the ground by storm winds in a short time. But if there are several trees together in a grove, then even the strongest winds cannot destroy then. **Mahabharata 5.36.62-63**

Read the story, "The Four Friends."

III. UNITY AMONG PRIESTS AND OTHER LEADERS OF THE SOCIETY

Walk together in harmony, speak in harmony
Let your minds be of one accord,
As the gods of old, being of one mind,
Accepted the share of sacrifice
(so may you share your belongings). **Rigveda 10.191.2**
May your counsel be common, your assembly united,
Common the mind, and the thoughts of these- united.
A common purpose do I lay before you,
And worship with your common oblation. **Rigveda 10.191.3**
Let your aims be common,
And your hearts of one accord,
And all of you be of one mind,
As you may live well together. **Rigveda 10.191.4**

Read the story, "The Importance of National Unity, Why we lost the Third Battle of Panipat?"

IV. FRIENDSHIP WITH EVERYONE IN THE SOCIETY

May all beings look on me with the eye of friend!
May I look on all beings with the eye of friend!
May we look on one another with the eye of friend! **Shukla Yajurveda (Mādhyandina Samhitā) 36.18**

See the story "The Secret of Success"

V. UNITY IN THE FAMILY

The union of hearts and minds and freedom from hate I'll bring you. Love one another as the cow loves the calf that she has borne. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhita) 3.30.1**

Let son be loyal to father and of one mind with his mother. Let wife speak to husband words that are honey sweet and gentle. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhita) 3.30.2**

Let not brother hate a brother, nor a sister hate a sister, unanimous, united in aims, speak you words with friendliness. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhita) 3.30.3**

I will make the prayer for that concord among men at home by which Devas do not separate, nor ever hate one another. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhita) 3.30.4**

Be not parted - growing old, taking thought, thriving together, moving under a common yoke; come speaking sweetly to one another; I'll make you have one aim and be of one mind. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhita) 3.30.5**

Common be your water-store, common your share of food; I bind you together to a common yoke; United, gather around the sacrificial fire, like spokes around the nave of a wheel. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhita) 3.30.6**

With your common desire I'll make you all have one aim, be of one mind, following one leader, like Devas who preserve their immortality. Morning and evening may there always be a loving heart in you. **Atharva Veda (Shaunaka Samhita) 3.30.7**

VI. RELIGIOUS UNITY

Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, Suparna the divine chariot, Gurutman – The Truth is One, but the wise call it by many different names. **Rigveda 1.164.46**

Read the story, "The Bhakta who Saw Vishnu but touched Shiva."

STORIES ON UNITY

STORY: HOW THE BRIDGE TO LANKA WAS CONSTRUCTED

Bhagavan Rama decided to attack Lanka. But how could he do it? Lanka was on the other side of the ocean. So they decided to build a bridge across the ocean with stones and wood. Many strong Vanaras or monkeys started lifting giant stones and trees to construct the bridge.

But when the Vanaras placed any stone into the water in the ocean, the stone would sink down. This is because stone is heavier than water. But one clever Vanara found that if he wrote the name 'Rama' on the stone, it would not sink on water. Instead, it would float on water. This made it easier to construct the bridge. *This story shows that if we chant the name of Bhagavan Rama as 'Rama, Rama, Rama' or if we write it many times on a notebook, all troubles and problems will go away. At the same time, we must also work hard, just like the Vanaras worked hard to construct the bridge.*

Monkey after monkey set to work carrying huge stones and enormous boulders to the seaside. Thousands of monkeys worked ceaselessly and King Rama was pleased. Then Rama noticed that a small brown squirrel rushed up and down from the hills to the shore carrying little pebbles in her mouth. "What is that little creature doing?" he wondered.

The monkeys also saw the squirrel and grew angry. "Get out of our way," they screeched. "You are too small. You are not needed."

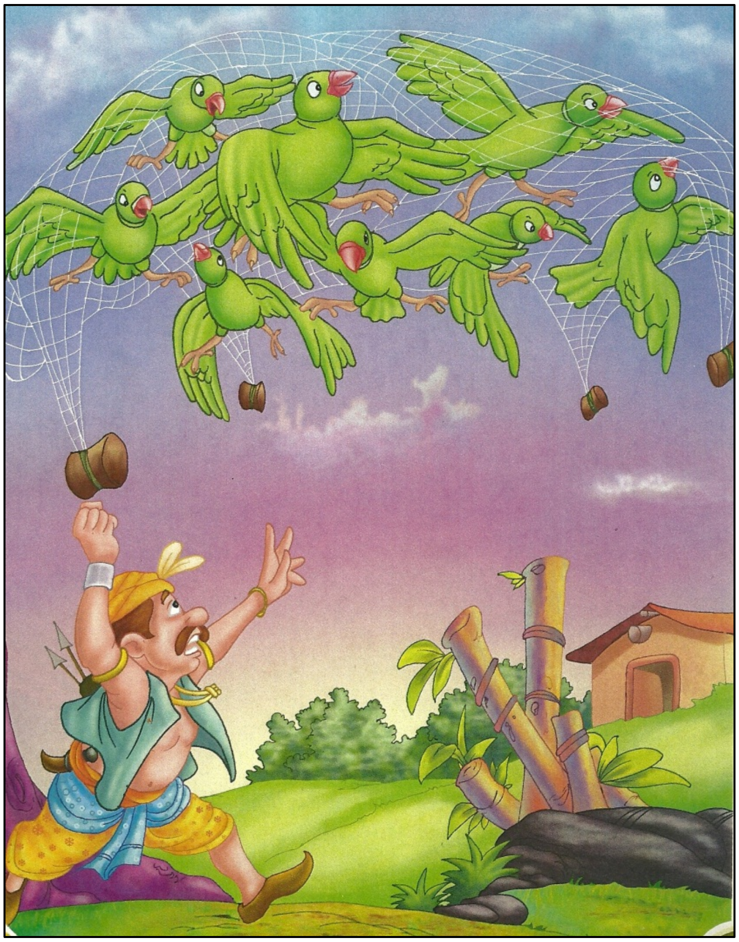
The little squirrel looked up and said, "I am helping to build the bridge to save Queen Sita." All the monkeys began to laugh. They held their sides and roared and hopped and mocked the little squirrel. "We have never heard anything so foolish in our entire lives," they said.

The squirrel answered, "I cannot carry rocks or stones. I can only lift small pebbles, but that is what I can do to help. My heart weeps for Sita and I want to be of assistance."

The monkeys moved the squirrel away, but she continued to carry small pebbles and pile them up nearby. Finally, one monkey grew so irritated that he lifted the little animal and threw her into the air. The squirrel cried out, "Rama!" Rama lifted his hand and caught the squirrel safely in his palm.

It was just at that moment that the monkeys realized they needed the little pebbles to place between the larger stones to keep the bridge from falling.

Rama said to them, "Monkeys, never despise the weak or the deeds of those that are not as strong as you. Each serves according to his strength and capacities and each is needed to make this bridge." With three fingers, King Rama drew three lines down the squirrel's back. *"What truly matters is not the strength one has, but how great one's love and devotion is.*" From that day forth squirrels have had three pale stripes on their rich brown furry backs - marks of the great Prince Rama. And that is how the strongest bridge across the sea was built.



Story: How the Parrots defeated the Bird Catching Hunter

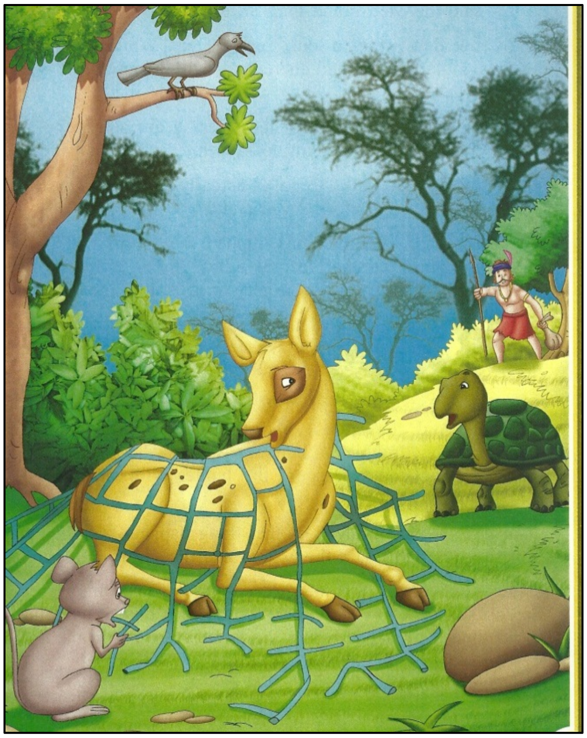
A group of parrots once saw corn thrown on the grass underneath a tree. They descended and started nibbling at the corn. But it was a trap – suddenly a net fell on all of them! They were trapped. Soon, the hunter who had set the trap started coming towards them.

The parrots were now terrified. They knew that the hunter would capture them in the net and then sell them in a market in cages. The eldest and wisest parrot suddenly had a great idea. He said, "Let us all fly up at the same time. Then, we can fly away from the hunter swiftly and go to the Sona Hill, where lives our friend mouse. When we reach there, the mouse can use his sharp teeth to cut the net open and free us.

So, all the parrots started flapping their wings at once and lifted the net. The bird catcher was surprised at what he saw. He started chasing them but became exhausted after a long run. The birds flew with the net together to the Sona Hill, where they found their friend, the mouse, who chewed up the net with his teeth and freed them.

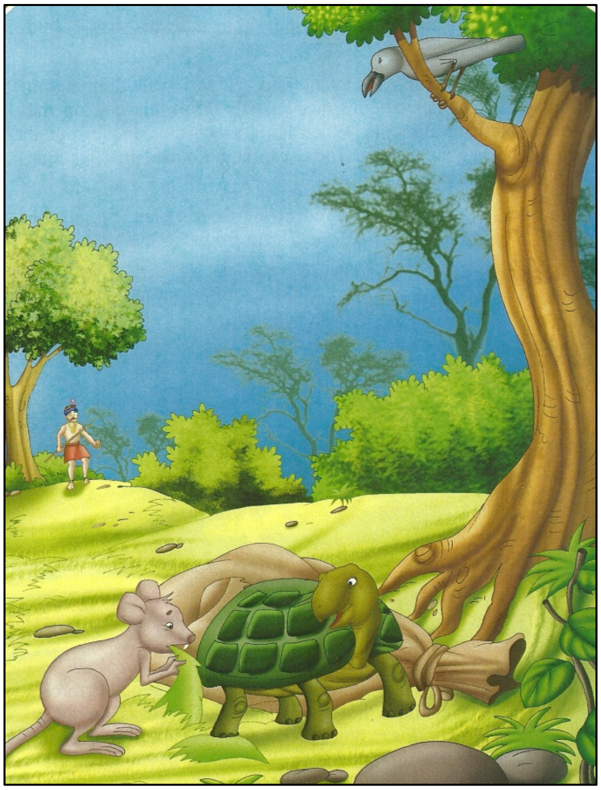
This story has a great message. The parrots as well as the mouse were very weak as compared to the hunter. But they applied their effort together, and as a result, they were able to defeat the hunter!

Story: The Four Friends



Once, a turtle, a crow, a mouse and a deer were fast friends and they lived around a lake. One day, the first three of them were playing around the lake, and realized that their fourth friend, the deer was not with them.

The crow went in search of the deer, and discovered that their friend had been trapped in a net by a hunter. The crow immediately flew back and told the mouse and turtle of what had happened. The three decided to free their friend from the trap, and started flying and walking towards the deer. Soon, the mouse reached the net and chewed it up with his teeth, freeing the deer. Suddenly, they saw the hunter come from a distance. The crow flew away, the mouse hit in a hole and the deer hid in a bush. Unfortunately, the slow walking turtle had also arrived by then, and did not have the time to hide himself. The hunter caught him in a bag and said, "I may have missed the deer, but now I can make dinner out of turtle meat." When the three friends of the turtle heard the words of the hunter, they were terrified. Something had to be done to free their friend turtle.



So, the deer came out of the bush, and pretended to limp in front of the hunter. The hunter was overjoyed and said, "It appears that I have double luck today. I have the turtle caught in the bag, and now I will catch this limp deer. So, he started chasing the deer with his bow and arrow and went away from the bag. The deer ran and ran, and took the hunter a long distance away from the bag in which the turtle had been trapped.

Meanwhile, the mouse came out of his hole, and cut a hole in the bad, freeing the turtle. The crow kept an eye out for the hunter all this time. The deer ran very fast, and finally the

hunter gave up chasing it. He said, “I cannot catch the deer today. Let me just go back now, and take that turtle that I had trapped in the bag.”

But when he returned, he found that the bag had been chewed open, and there was no turtle inside it. In fact, all the three friends had escaped while the hunter was chasing the deer. The hunter was now very upset, but he could not do anything.

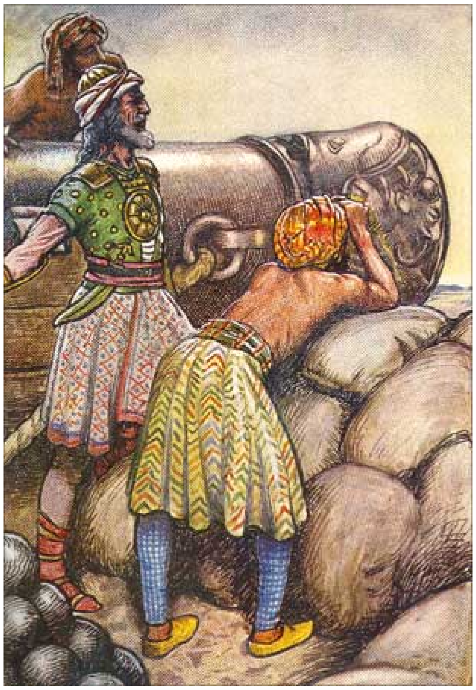
This story shows how four very different animals used their respective skills to protect each other, because they were united as a team.

Story: The Importance of National Unity- Why we lost the Third Battle of Panipat

Panipat is a city located on a plain a little north of New Delhi, in the Indian state of Haryana (can you locate it in the map of India below?). In the history of medieval India, the three battles of Panipat (fought in 1528, 1556 and 1761 respectively) have played a decisive role in the turn of events. In all the three battles, the invader from Central Asia one, and the Indian ruler lost. And each of these battles have a lesson to teach us for future. Let us study the lesson that the Third Battle of Panipat, that was fought between the troops of Afghan King Ahmad Shah Abdali on one hand and the Indian troops lead by the Hindu Marathas from Maharashtra in western India.

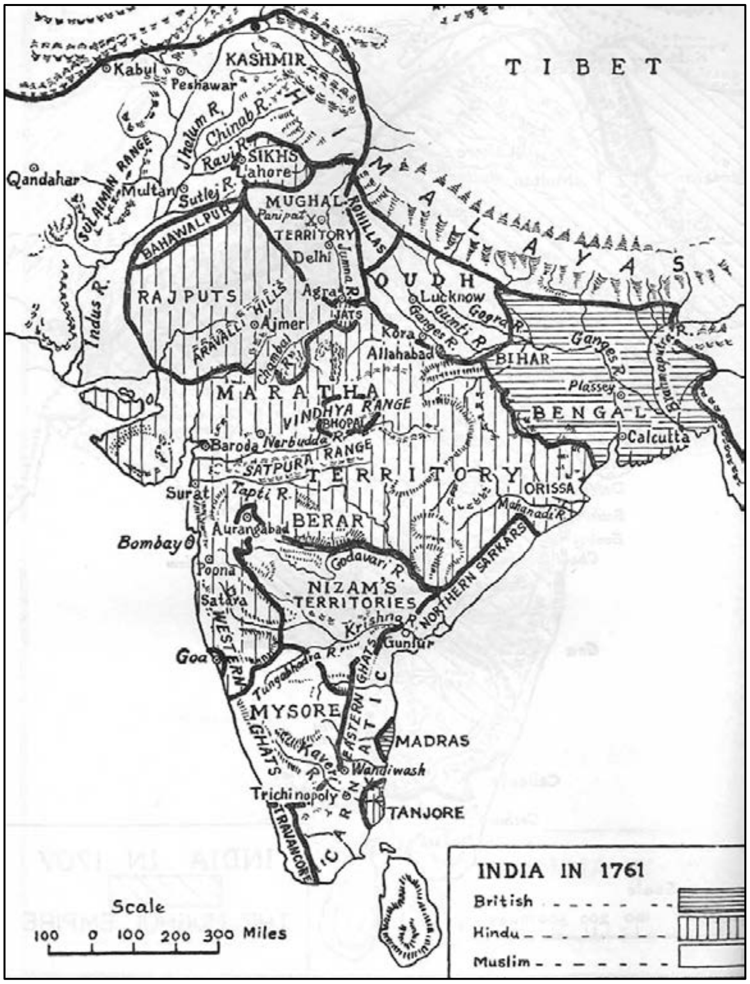
After the rule of the fanatical Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb (1658 – 1701 CE), Hindus in various parts of India rose against the Moghul rule in various parts of India. One of the most successful revolts was that of the Marathas, led by Shivaji. The battle was carried on by his successors, and within a few decades, the Maratha armies marched all over central and northern India and even reached the river Indus close to Afghanistan.

Some Muslim leaders in India got worried that the Marathas are overthrowing Islamic rule in India, and they invited the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali to invade India and re-establish Muslim power. The Marathas should have rallied other Hindu rulers like the Rajputs of Western India, and the Jats and the Sikhs of the Punjab in northern India, but they were too proud of their own prowess. Moreover, the Marathas had levied heavy taxes on all of these Hindu groups and therefore did not get their support. Consequently, they were able to raise an army of only 40,000 on their own accord, to face the 60,000 army of Abdali. Moreover, Abdali had support from several Muslim rulers of northern India and was assured of supplies even in the foreign territory of India. The Afghan ruler had a cakewalk from Afghanistan all the way to Panipat, where the two armies faced each other for several weeks. None of the two sides dared to attack the other.



One day, Abdali noticed that every evening, multiple fires were lit in the Maratha camp. He sent a spy to enquire. The spy examined the Maratha encampment and reported, “Your majesty, the Hindus of different castes do not eat together. Therefore, they are cooking their food separately.” Abdali smiled and said, “If the Hindus cannot even eat together, then how can they fight united?” This gave him added confidence, and the resulting war lead to a total rout of the Marathas.

The consequences of this war were disastrous. The Marathas could never establish their rule over the Punjab and other parts of NW India again. The Afghan ruler advanced further into northern India, where he destroyed the holy Hindu city of Mathura and slaughtered thousands of Hindus. Luckily for us, there was trouble back home for Abdali and he had to return hastily. But on his way, he desecrated the Harimandir Sahib, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs in the city of Amritsar, buy filling its sacred water tank with the blood and bodies of dead humans and cows. His soldiers also captured several Hindu women to take them back to their country as slaves. These acts really angered the Sikhs, and they well upon the retreating Afghan soldiers as Guerillas to harass them and free the captured Hindu women. The Sikhs soon exacted their own revenge by driving out the Afghans or enslaving them to re-construct the Harimandir Sahib temple.

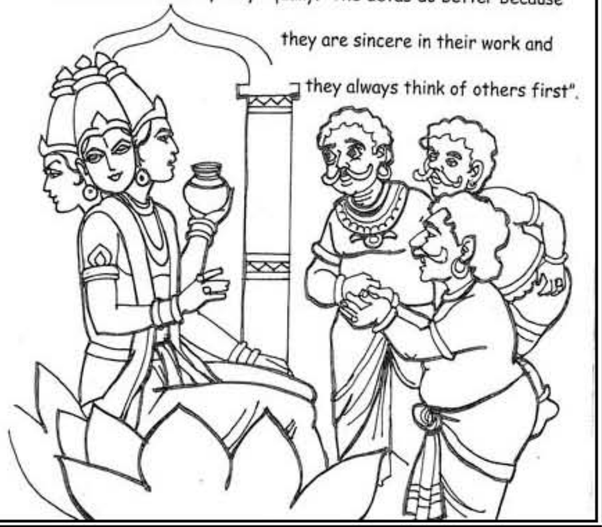


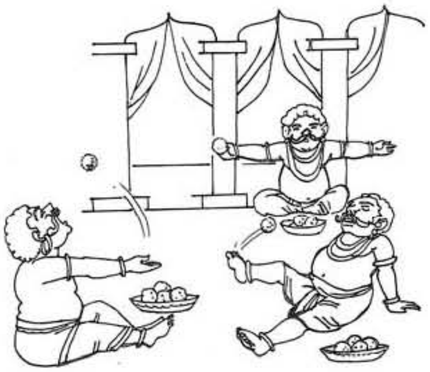
But nevertheless, only if the Marathas had shown effective leadership in uniting all the Hindu groups, and if their own army were not divided along the caste lines, they had a much better chance of completely defeating Abdali in the third battle of Panipat. This defeat is a lesson for us that in the face of external aggression, all the groups within our country should unite, forgetting our egos and past enmities and face the foreign enemy united. Because ‘United we Stand, and Divided We Fall.’

STORY: THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

11 THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

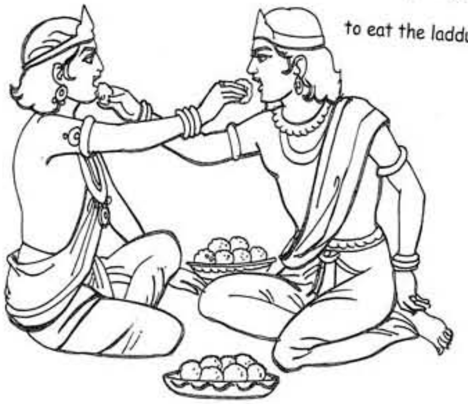
The asuras were always at war with the devas. Since the devas always won, the asuras were jealous of them. Once they complained to Lord Brahma. "You always take their side, that is why they do well in everything". The Lord replied, "I do not take sides. I treat everybody equally. The devas do better because they are sincere in their work and they always think of others first".





The asuras did not believe this. To prove this point to them, Lord Brahma conducted a test in the form of a feast. He served laddus to all of them and said, "your test begins now. You should eat the laddus without bending your elbows and your backs". The asuras sat to eat. They tried all means to eat the laddus without bending their elbows and backs. But in the end, gave up. They had to accept defeat.

Lord Brahma now called the devas and put them through the same test. The humble devas passed the test easily! Each deva gave the laddu to the one sitting opposite him. So their elbows and backs remained straight. Lord Brahma told the asuras, "Look, you thought about yourself first that is why you could not eat the laddus. But the devas thought of feeding others first and so everybody got to eat the laddus".



Therefore understand the truth that those who think of the needs of others first and are not selfish, will always succeed.

STORY: The Bhakta who Saw Vishnu but touched Shiva

We should respect all Forms of Bhagavan. We should not make fun of someone else's Ishta Devata. Hindus who make fun other people's Ishta Devata or of their religion cannot be good Hindus. Let us now read the story of a man who loved Shiva but hated Vishnu. Let us see how Bhagavan Shiva taught him a very useful lesson about loving both Shiva and Vishnu.

The town of Pandharpur was famous for its temple of Vithoba, a form of Bhagavan Vishnu. In that town also lived a famous goldsmith named Narahari. He was a great bhakta of Shiva but he decided that he will not worship would not worship any form of Bhagavan but Shiva.

Once, a rich merchant had no son. He made a promise to Vishnu that if he became a father, he would give a gold waistband to Vithoba Murti to thank Bhagavan. His prayers were answered. Soon, a boy was born to him and his wife. The merchant approached Narahari and requested him to take the waist measurement of the mūrti of Vithoba for making the gold waistband. But Narahari refused flatly even if that meant losing the business. So the merchant offered to measure it himself and bring the measurement to Narhari. He went to the temple, took the measurement and then gave it to Narahari. Unfortunately, when the gold waistband was put around the murti, it was found to be somewhat shorter than needed. The merchant took it back to Narahari and requested him to add one more section to make it a bit longer. But, this time the merchant discovered that the waistband was a little too long.

Annoyed, the merchant requested Narahari to go himself to the temple to take the measurement of the murti's waist. Narahari did not even want to see the murti of Vishnu Vithoba, but he agreed on the condition that he will be taken blind-folded to the temple. The merchant agreed to this condition. While Narahari was being taken to the Mandir with the blindfold, the pilgrims took pity on him for his foolishness for not seeing the beautiful murti. But Narahari would not change his mind.

There inside the temple, the blind-folded Narahari placed his tape-measure around the Mūrti of Vithoba. But instead of feeling the stone murti, he felt elephant skin, just like the skin that Shiva wears on His waist. Narahari was a little shocked. He put the tape-measure around the waist again. But once again, he felt a murti of Shiva with an elephant skin around it. Narahari was convinced that the foolish worshippers of Vithoba were actually worshipping a murti of Shiva.

So he took off his blindfold. But now he got a bigger surprise. He saw that he was indeed looking at the murti of Vishnu Vithoba and there was no elephant skin around its waist. He tied the blindfold again around his head and started measuring the waist. But once again, he felt that he was touching a Mūrti of Shiva. Upon taking off the blind-fold, Narahari now saw again that it was actually Vithoba and not Shiva.

Narahari understood what Shiva was trying to teach to him – that Shiva and Vishnu are one and it was foolish on part of Narahari to assume that he could worship Shiva but totally ignore Vishnu, because They are one half of each other.

36. Truth & Honesty

36.1 What are Truth and Honesty?

Truth means describing something exactly as we saw it, heard it or sensed it in some other way to others. Hindu scriptures say the following about truth -

> Where there is truth, there is Dharma; where there is Dharma, there is light; and where there is light, there is happiness. Conversely, where there is falsehood, there is Adharma; where there is Adharma, there is darkness; and where there is darkness, there is sorrow. **Mahābhārata 12.190.5**
>
> There are four austerities of speech – to keep quiet instead of speaking nonsense, to speak the truth, to speak endearing words, and to speak that which is in conformity with Dharma. **Mahābhārata 12.299.38**

Honest means behaving with others in a truthful and in a straightforward way, not manipulate others or play with their emotions, and not cheat them in financial transactions.

Truth and honesty are very basic human virtues and he who does not have them is not considered a good human being, not a good friend material and not a good companion or spouse. No one trusts someone who does not speak the truth, as is illustrated in the fable of Aesop given below.

STORY (AESOP'S FABLE): THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF:

There was a shepherd boy who looked after his village sheep. He took them to the land on which grass grew, so that the sheep could eat. One day, as the sheep were eating grass, the boy felt bored. So he played a trick. He started yelling, "Wolf, wolf! A wolf has come from the forest and is killing the sheep." When the villagers heard him, they rushed with sticks and knives but found no wolf. The realized that the boy had lied.

The shepherd boy did the same joke on some other days. Every time the villages came, they saw that there was no wolf attacking the sheep. They were angry at the boy for wasting their time. After the boy did this trick a few times, the villagers stopped believing in him.

One day, a wolf actually did come and started eating the sheep. Once again, the boy cried, "Wolf, wolf." But the villagers thought that he was lying. No one

came to drive the wolf away. The wolf killed all the sheep! The story shows that no one believes a liar even if he speaks the truth.

36.2 Truth and the Strength of One's Character

A person who is honest and speaks the truth even when there is a danger to his life, health, and wealth etc., is said to be one of a very strong character. In the Hindu tradition, we revere the life of King Harishchandra (an ancestor of Bhagavān Rama) because he was willing to forgo everything for the sake of truth, and for keeping his word.

Another story is that of Satyakāma, who risked being refused admission to the elite school of Rishi Gautama if he spoke the truth.

Story: Harishchandra, the Truthful King

Several thousand years ago, the city of Ayodhya was ruled by King Harishchandra. He was a very good king who took great care of everyone in his kingdom. He was famous for being truthful and fair. He was married to Queen Chandramatī. Together, they had a son named Rohitāshva ('Rohita' for short).

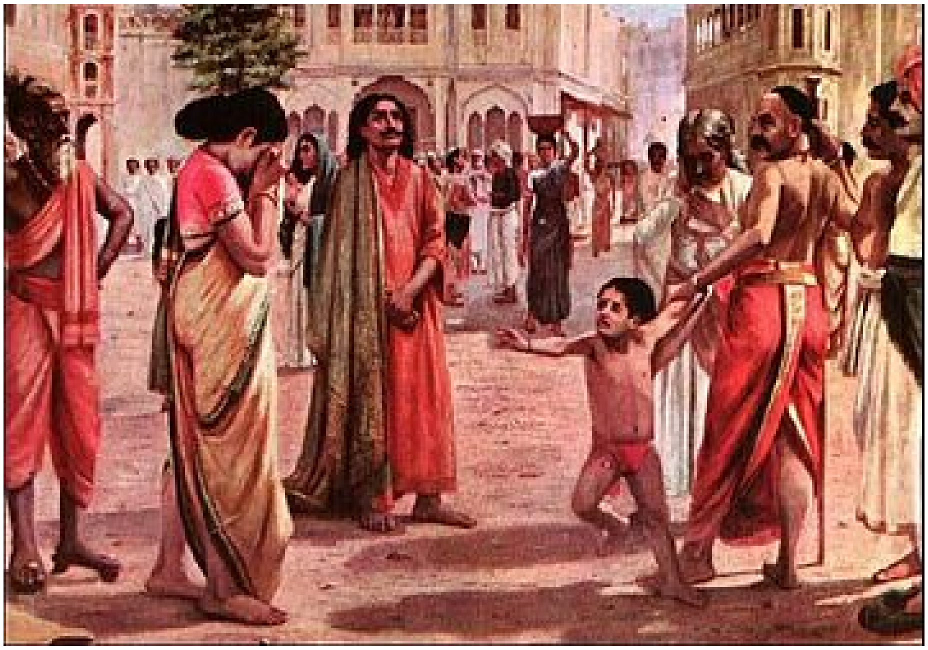
One day, Rishi Vishvamitra decided to test Harishchandra. By his powers of Yoga, Vishvamitra changed his form to become a wild pig. This pig played havoc in Ayodhya. Everyone was fed up of the pig. Harishchandra decided to get rid of the pig himself. He started chasing the pig out of the city and entered a jungle. As he was chasing the pig in the forest, Harishchandra lost his way. The pig disappeared.

In fact, the pig had changed itself into a Brāhmana. When the king saw the Brāhmana, he bowed out of respect. He did not recognize the fact that it was the Rishi who had changed himself to a pig and then to a Brahmana. The king asked the Brāhmana if he knew the way back to Ayodhya. The king promised to give any gift to the Brāhmana if he could help him reach his palace in Ayodhya. The Brāhmana agreed and asked the king to follow him, till they reached Ayodhya.

There, in Ayodhya, the Brāhmana reminded the king of his promise. He now changed himself to his true form of Vishvamitra. Then he said, "I want you to gift your entire kingdom to me." The king was shocked, but he had to keep his promise. But the Brāhmana then put in one more condition, "What you gave to me was only because you had given me a promise. I am a very respected Rishi. Therefore, I want you to give me some more donation too."

Now, Harishchandra was in a fix. He had already given away everything to Vishvamitra. So he requested, "Rishi, please give me one month. I and my wife will arrange some money and give the gift to you after that time." Vishvamitra agreed.

The king, his wife and their son now walked from Ayodhya to another city named Varanasi. Harishchandra tried to find work for many, many days. But no one offered him a job. One month was almost over and Harishchandra now really got worried. Chandramatī felt sad to see her husband so upset. So she said, "Why don't you sell me as a maid to someone else. With that money, you can give the donation to Vishvamitra."



Harishchandra was very surprised to hear this. But he had no choice. This time, Vishvamitra took on another disguise and appeared in front of them. He offered to buy Chandramatī and Rohitāshva for some money. Harishchandra took all the money to Sage Vishvamitra's home and offered it as donation. But Vishvamitra was not happy, "What! This is so little. I need more. By the sunset today, you must get me some more money for donation." So, Harishchandra started looking for another job.

Luckily, the owner of a cremation ground (a place where dead bodies are burned) offered him the job of a doorkeeper. Harishchandra's duty was to collect money from the families who brought in the dead for cremation. Meanwhile, while Rohitāshva was playing on the banks of the Ganga river, a snake bit him and he died. Now Chandramatī almost became mad with grief. She begged her master to let her go so that she could at least take her dead son for a cremation. But the master (who was actually Vishvamitra in disguise) said, "I have already lost money because your son has died. I had paid money to get him, did I not? Now I want you to work during the day. In the night, you can carry your son's dead body and take him for cremation."

At night, Chandramatī carried her son's body to the cremation ground. Due to darkness and because she was so sad, her voice and appearance had changed. The doorkeeper, who was none other than her husband Harishchandra, did not recognize her. He demanded a fee for the ticket before she could enter the cremation ground. Chandramatī cried and said, "I do not have any money. The only thing I have is this Mangalasutra. Take it, and let me go in so that I can at least cremate my son." A mangalasutra is a necklace of black beads and gold that is worn by all married Hindu women. When Harishchandra saw the mangalasutra, he immediately realized that it was none other than his wife. And it was none other than their son who had died! Both of them wept a lot at their bad luck and at their condition.

But Harishchandra was so honest that he would not permit his own wife to cremate their own son till she paid the fee for entering the cremation ground. So the two made a deal – they said, "There is nothing more left in our life. Our only son has died. We have no money. And there is no way we can be happy. Let us cremate ourselves with our son's body."

So Harishchandra set up a pile of woods. On it, he placed Rohitāshva's body. Then, he and his wife started to enter the fire. But as soon as they took a step towards the fire, a miracle happened. Rohita came back to life, the fire blew out. Devatās appeared in the sky, and they saw Rishi Vishvamitra standing right next to them.

The Rishi said, "Dear King Harishchandra, I was only testing your honesty. You had to suffer so much and yet, you tried everything you could have done to give me my donation. You have kept your word. You are a very great man. I have brought your son back to life." Then, Rishi Vishvamitra returned the kingdom to Harishchandra.

Now the king and queen returned to their palace in Ayodhya, where they ruled with fairness for several years. And after their death, they were both taken to heaven, because they had been so truthful in their entire life.

The story of King Harishchandra teaches us that once we give a promise, we should keep it. We may have to suffer a lot to keep our promise. But we should not break our word given to someone else.

DID YOU KNOW? The story of King Harishchandra has been very famous in India. Mahatma Gandhi was inspired a lot by the honesty of this king. To honor him, the very first movie made in India (in the year 1913) was 'Raja Harishchandra'. The movie was 40 minutes long. It was in black and white (not in color) and was a 'silent movie' because in those days, we did not have the technology to record the voice of actors and play it along with the scenes in the movie! The film was made by Dada Saheb Phalke and was a super hit. Today, India makes the largest number of movies among all the countries of the world, but 'Raja Harishchandra' was the very first Indian movie.

Trick Question: What was the language in which the movie 'Raja Harishchandra' was made?

Satyakāma Jabāla, the truthful Student:

Once, a boy named Satyakāma Jābāla wanted to study a lot. He heard that Rishi Hāridrumata Gautama was a very renowned scholar and that he was accepting new students. So he approached Gautama with a request to take him in as a student too. In those days, it was a custom for the teacher to ask about the family background of their students because the students had to live all the time with others in boarding schools. They would interact with each other throughout the day. A single student from a bad family could spoil the atmosphere of the boarding school. For this reason, famous teachers who ran the top-

notch schools had to make sure that all of their students were from good families and had good values. Therefore, Gautama also asked Satyakāma, "What is your family background, and who are your mother and father?"

Now, Satyakāma had never seen his father. So he went to his mother to ask. When he put the question to her, she trembled with fear, but told him truthfully, "When I was young, I knew a lot of men. Therefore, I do not know who your father was. My name is Jābāla. Therefore you are Satyakāma Jābāla." Now Satyakāma felt ashamed of what he heard. He thought that if he were to tell the truth to his teacher, he would be refused admission outright. But he decided to speak the truth.

When he approached the teacher, he found all other students in the classroom studying. The teacher asked him, 'Did you find out about your family details?" Satyakāma Jābāla said, "Guruji, my mother Jābāla does not know who my father was. Therefore, she said that I am Satyakāma Jābāla." When the students heard this, there was a hushed silence, because they were all aghast. They were sure that Gautama would immediately turn him out of the school.

But Gautama said, "This child did not hesitate to speak the truth. And truth alone is the true mark of belonging to good family. And therefore, I have no hesitation to say that Satyakāma's parents are both very noble because he did not hesitate to speak the truth to me. I will surely accept him as my student."

And so, Satyakāma became a student of Gautama. In fact, in the course of time, he became a great Rishi himself, and compiled several Vedic and other Hindu scriptures. The Jābāla Upanishad, a sacred scripture of the Hindus named after him still exists and is highly respected to this day.

A more contemporary example is given below, where a businessman actually speaks the truth out of honesty to lose money.

Story: Business Owner returns extra Money back to his Insurance Company

Once, Gita Press, a publisher of Hindu scriptures in N India, set up a stall for sale of its books during the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar. Unfortunately, a fire broke out in the area and the stall of the Gita Press also suffered a lot of damage. The shop caretaker filed a claim for Rs 14,000 (which was the total insured amount of the books) with the insurance company and got a check for this

amount soon from them.

A few days later, the owner of Gita Press Jaydayal Goenka asked the shop care-taker, "Did we sell any books before the fire broke out?" The shopkeeper confirmed that half the books worth Rs 7000 had been sold and the money collected had been safely deposited before the remaining books got destroyed.

Goenka was furious when he heard this and reprimanded his employee, "If you had already sold books worth Rs 7000, then how dare you filed a claim for Rs 14,000? I want you to return the excess Rs 7000 to the insurance company and ask them for forgiveness for this lapse.[42]

36.3 Speaking a Lie by not speaking the Truth

Another type of lie is when we deliberately keep quiet when we should have spoken a truth. We kept quiet because we were scared, or because we think that we will lose a lot of money or friends by speaking the truth.

In several lawsuits involving crimes like murder and robbery, the courts request witnesses to come forward to either give evidence against, or in favor of the accused. Suppose you come to know that a man accused of murder was not the actual culprit because you were present at the scene of the crime, and had seen the actually murderer, then it is your duty to step forward and give your witness statement. But if you are scared that by getting the accused released and by revealing the name of the true murderer your own life will get endangered (because the true murderer will get his henchman to kill you if he finds out that you are going to reveal his name to others), then you will not go to the court to give your testimony. As a result of your silence, the falsely accused person might get convicted and get hanged, although you saved your own life.

In such situations, it requires real courage and intelligence to act correctly. You could request for police protection in return for your eye-witness account, or request anonymity in return for providing the evidence the court needs. But if you just stay scared and do not try anything at all, an innocent person will lose his life. This is an example of a silence that is equivalent to speaking a big lie.

36.4 Half Truths

Sometimes, we speak a half truth and a half lie. In the Mahabharata, we come across an incident where a person who always spoke the truth had to speak a lie for the sake of Dharma. In the great war between the righteous Pandavas and the evil Kauravas, the Pandavas were having a tough time defeating Drona, who was fighting on behalf of the Kauravas. They knew that Drona really loved Ashvatthāmā, his only son. So Krishna asked Bhima to kill the elephant Ashvatthāmā.

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[42] Swami Akhandanand Saraswati (1970), p. 74

Then, he asked Yudhishthira to say the sentence, "Ashvatthāma, the elephant, is dead" and told him that the words "the elephant," will be drowned out by a loud sound. So when Yudhishthira was speaking this sentence, Krishna blew his conch shell exactly at the time of the words "the elephant." All that Drona heard was "Ashvatthāmā is dead," and he was shocked to learn that his son is death. As he heard it from Yudhishthira, he had no reason to disbelief it. He lost all will to fight, and another warrior Dhrishtadyumna came up from behind and beheaded Drona.

Prior to this incident, Yudhishthira's chariot wheels always levitated a little above the ground. But after he had spoken his first lie of his life, the wheels came down to the ground with a thud. When he died, he had to visit hell for a short time, to pay for this life that he had spoken. However, the punishment that he received for being a part of a lie that caused Drona's death was very mild. The reason was that Yudhishthira was on the side of Dharma, and he had spoken the lie so that Dharma wins.

36.5 Instances where we should speak a Lie

However, there are instances where speaking a lie is not considered a bad thing, or where speaking a truth is bad whereas speaking a lie is good.

Sage Narada said – Speaking the truth is a good thing, but even better is speaking that which promotes the welfare of others. In fact, I am of the firm opinion that those words alone are truth which promote the welfare of other living beings. **Mahābhārata 12.329.13**

Sharmishtha says to King Yayati – Words said in joke do not cause harm even if they are lies. If one says a lie to his wife, during marriage, to save one's life or to prevent the loss of all possessions – then these five lies are not considered as evil/sin. **Mahābhārata 1.82.16**

Sharmishtha says to Yayati - If some bears false witness to save another man's life, then calling that witness a liar would be incorrect. But where the witness utters a lie to save only his life and not that of another person whose life also depends on his deposition, then the lying witness will get destroyed by his falsehood. **Mahābhārata 1.82.17**

Bheeshma said – If lying under oath fees you from captivity by evil captors, then speak that lie. As much as possible, do not let wealth pass into the hands of evil people because wealth gifted to them will recoil and cause harm to the giver himself. **Mahābhārata 12.109.16-17**

Story: Sage Kaushika Goes to Hell for Speaking the Truth

In the Mahābhārata, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna a story illustrating how speaking a harsh truth that causes harm to others is sinful.

Lord Krishna describes a Brahmana named Kaushika who took a vow of speaking truth at all the times. He constructs a hut on the banks of Ganga, and spends all his time praying and practicing meditation. He never speaks a single lie, and becomes famous as a saint who always speaks the truth.

One day, a band of bandits came to his home, chasing a group of innocent people who were trying to escape bandits and had passed by Kaushika's home. The bandits say to Kaushika – "You never speak a lie. Therefore tell us – in which direction have the people we are chasing gone?"

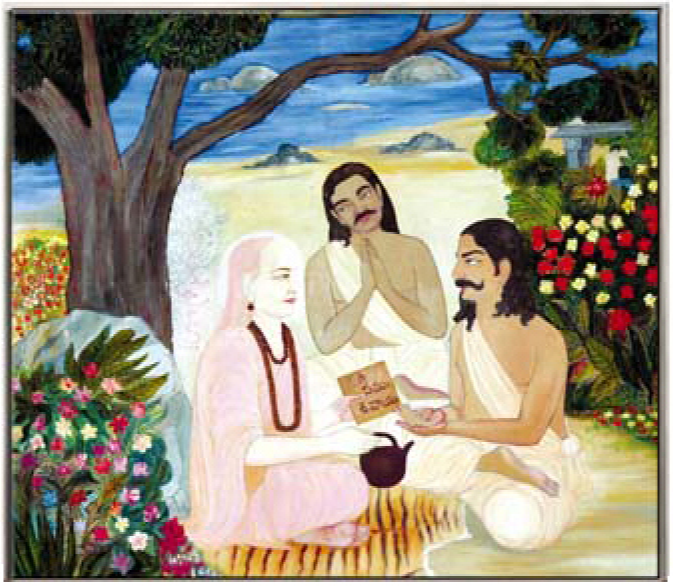
Kaushika knew that if he spoke the truth, the bandits will find the innocent fleeing people, and they will rob and kill them. But he thought that he must speak untruthfully because he had taken a vow to speak the truth always. Therefore, upon being asked as to whereabouts of these innocent people fleeing the bandings, Kaushika tells the bandits which direction the people went. As a result the bandits captured the innocent victims and killed them.

Lord Krishna calls this 'truthful' Kaushika as a fool, as one ignorant of Dharma who misused his vow of speaking truth always to cause harm to innocent people; and as a result of speaking this 'truth', Kaushika went to Hell.

Krishna then summarizes his teaching to Arjuna in the following verses –

> Speaking the truth always is indeed a great virtue. Indeed, nothing no virtue is perhaps superior to speaking the truth. But the practical aspects of speaking truth are very difficult to understand. **Mahabharata 8.49.27**
> Sometimes truth is protected by speaking the truth, sometimes by not speaking it at all or sometimes even by speaking a lie. If a person is losing everything, then it is better to speak a lie if that lie will save that person from utter ruin. **Mahabharata 8.49.28**
> If speaking a truth will cause someone's death or break someone's marriage, then it is better to say a lie. In such situations, speaking the truth is equivalent to a lie, and speaking a lie is equivalent to speaking the truth. **Mahabharata 8.49.29**
> Only a fool thinks that speaking a formal truth alone is Dharma at all times. Instead, he alone is a knower of Dharma who speaks the truth only after considering the situation (as stated in the above verses). **Mahabharata 8.49.30**
> If a false promise can get you freedom from kidnappers, then better say a lie. It would be a greater evil to promise a ransom to kidnappers and then pay the amount to them after freedom because wealth given to evil men begets misery for the speaker of the truth himself. One must not therefore hesitate to speak a lie if it promotes Dharma. **Mahabharata 8.49.54-55**

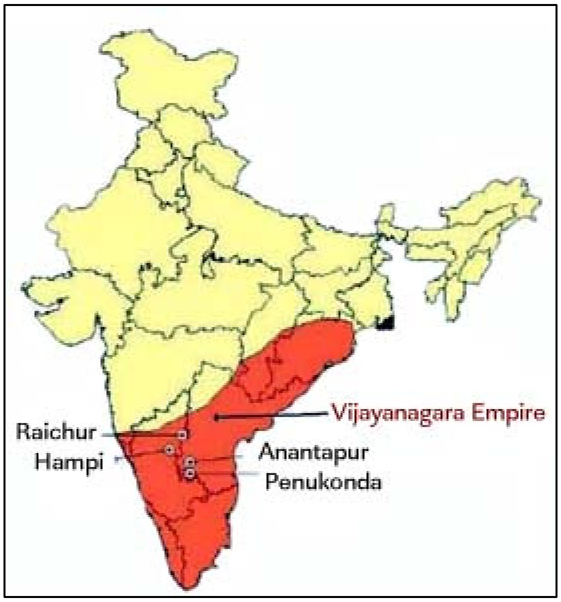
Another example where it was OK to be dishonest and speak a lie is from Indian history in the life of brothers Harihara and Bukka:



Story: Double-Crossing Brothers Save the Dharma of Hindus

In the 14th cent. CE, Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the Muslim Sultan of Delhi, invaded south India, he smashed several temples (replacing them with mosques), massacred Hindus and did several other atrocities against Hindus. In one of these campaigns, he captured the fort of Kumata (the chief Ramanatha died in the battle and all the ladies committed Jauhar – an act of suicide to prevent capture and dishonor by the enemy), and all the residents of the fort, including Harihara and Bukka were captured, taken to Delhi and converted to Islam.

The Hindus remaining in that region soon rose in rebellion. This adverse turn of events in that area forced Tughlaq to depend on the two converted brothers, who had belonged the erstwhile nobility of that region. He made them administer oaths of loyalty and sent them South to curb the revolts and rule the region under his name. However, when the brothers reached their native region, an influential Hindu monk Swami Vidyaranya inspired them to return to their ancestral faith. Further, there was an uprising of Hindus in the region and Harihara and Bukka attained the role of leaders of Hindus and established Hindu rule there, guided by the Swami and his scholarly brothers Sayana and Mayana.



The two brothers established the glorious Hindu Vijayanagara Empire in the region that lasted for over two centuries. This period led to a revival of Hindu Dharma in South India, and prevented it from becoming destroyed. While the empire lasted, dozens of Hindu scholars and saints arose in the region, and they wrote thousands of explanations on Hindu scriptures, devotional hymns to Hindu Devatas and several temples were constructed across the region. These contributions of the Hindu Empire continue to influence Hindus to the present day. In short, this act of 'double-crossing' of the fanatical Sultan by the two brothers who were converted to Islam by force, saved our Dharma in South India.

36.6 Difference between a Bitter Truth and an Evil-Intentioned Truth:

A bitter truth is one which hurts the listener but has been said for his benefit. E.g., during a parent-teacher meeting or conference, the teacher has to tell the truth about your bad grades to your parents. Although this news causes them pain, they need to know it so that they can work with you at home to work harder on your studies. The teacher's intention in giving the bad news to your parents is good, because she wants you to study better and improve your grades.

On the contrary, an evil-intentioned truth involves speaking the truth with the intent of hurting the listener. Such people are described very aptly in this Sanskrit proverb:

> "A wicked man feels elated when he has hurts others with his unkind words. On the contrary, a good man repents immediately even if he makes an unkind remark out of carelessness." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 67**

36.7 Truth and Responsibility

Truth is defined as speech that is free from hurt and from falsehood, and which is also consistent with the facts. But, it is not sufficient that our intentions are good when we speak the truth. In addition to good intention, we should also make sure that we ascertain our facts.

For example, a traveler who is lost asks us for directions to reach his friend's home. We give him the directions believing them to be correct, even though they are not. As a result, the traveler gets lost. Although our intentions were good and we thought that we gave the correct directions, we did not make sure that we really knew the correct path. Because of our carelessness, the traveler got lost.

This example shows that we have a responsibility to make sure that our facts are also correct.

36.8 Truth and Sensitivity: Joke with Care

Sometimes it is not our intention to hurt the other person. But we say something that is true and hurts the listener, even though we had not wanted to hurt him. Therefore, we should be sensitive to how the other person will react to our statements.

Sometimes, we say innocent lies to others to joke and have a little fun. E.g., saying to a friend, "Look, there is an ugly sticker pasted on your backside," when there is none is an innocent lie that startles your friend and allows everyone to have some fun. There is nothing wrong in doing so, especially if we joke with our friends. However, when we are joking, we should be sensitive of how others feel. If we keep joking with the same person all the time, it becomes teasing, harassment and bullying.

Also, some people might be very sensitive about certain things and we should not joke to them about that because they might take things seriously. E.g., joking to elderly parents by saying, "You don't expect me to take care of your medical bills, do you?" is a poor joke even if you intend to pay their bills because your parents can take it to their heart that they are dependent on you for help in paying their bills.

36.9 Types of Truth and their Acceptability

From the above discussion, it is clear that speaking the truth is not as straightforward as it appears to be. Sometimes, we have to speak a lie, sometimes we should just keep quiet, sometimes we must speak a bitter truth and so on. The table below gives the summary of guidelines that we should follow to decide whether we should speak the truth or not in a given situation:

Type of Truth	***Example***	***Acceptability***
Factually correct and meant to cause happiness	"Bhagavān is our Creator, Provider and he wants us to speak the truth."	Acceptable
Factually a lie, but intended to cause happiness	A physician does not want to tell his patient that he has a dreadful cancer because telling the truth to the patient will cause him a lot of pain and reduce the chances of his recovery. Therefore, the physician tells the patient that his cancer is very mild and will go away with simple treatment.	Acceptable. In colloquial English, this lie is called a 'white lie'.
Factually correct but meant to cause pain and sorrow	My cousin invites me to see her new house. When I come to see the house, I tell her that I don't like it and that it wasn't worth the amount that she paid for it. Or, telling on your sibling with the devious intention of getting him or her scolded by your parents.	Unacceptable
Factually incorrect and meant to cause pain and sorrow	Ram knew that Sohan was blind. When Sohan tripped and fell, Ram pretended that he did not know of Sohan's blindness and shouted, "You idiot, can't you see with your two eyes?"	Unacceptable

37. Straightforwardness & Simplicity

37.1 What is Straightforwardness?

This virtue means that we should be simple in our behavior towards others. We should not try to behave with others in a crooked and deceitful manner. Rather, we should be honest. We should be open about our weaknesses, and avoid being pretentious.

> Lord Shiva said to Devi Parvati – Straightforwardness is Dharma and crookedness is Adharma. Only that person who has a straightforward nature gets the fruit of Dharma. **Mahābhārata 13.142.30**
>
> Lord Krishna said – Crookedness is the abode of death, whereas straightforwardness leads to the Supreme Being. This understanding alone is true knowledge, so why should one teach any other nonsense? **Mahābhārata 14.11.4**
>
> In the case of great men, their actions are consistent with their speech, and the speech is consistent with their thoughts. But in case of evil men, their actions are inconsistent with their words, and their words do not reflect what they actually think. **Sanskrit proverb**

37.2 Is a Straightforward Person Naïve?

Being a straightforward person does not mean that we should be completely naïve and foolish. We must not let others take advantage of us or take us for a ride. All it means is that we should not be crooked, and should not take advantage of others. A Sanskrit poet says it very beautifully –

> "It is not advisable to be completely straightforward to the extent of being naïve. When the forest is cut down, the erect and straight trees get hacked down immediately but the curved creepers get saved from destruction." **Sanskrit Proverb**

Also, being straightforward does not mean that we are blunt to the extent of being rough and insensitive. This is illustrated with the help of a story from the life of Raja Birbal, a clever Hindu from Bengal who served under Emperor Akbar (1556 – 1605 CE).

Story: Birbal teaches the Astrologer how to Package his predictions

One day, an astrologer came to Birbal to seek his advice. He had gone to the home of a rich man who requested him to read the lines on his palm

and predict his future. The astrologer examined the palm and said, "You will see all your relatives die in front of your own eyes."
The rich man had become so infuriated with the astrologer, that he had him beaten up and had him thrown out of his home. The astrologer then came to Birbal to understand why he had suffered for merely speaking the truth.
Birbal said to him, "No one wants to see his loved ones die in front of him. That was obviously a wrong thing to say, even though it was factually a correct prediction. Why don't you go back to him after a few months, and give the following prediction to him, "You will really live long and will be the longest lived person in your social circles."
The astrologer did as he was told, and was surprised that the rich man was now very pleased with him and even rewarded him with a few gold coins.
The astrologer understood the advice of Birbal. He had said essentially the same thing to the rich man both the times, but the second time on, he had said it more gently and in a more acceptable manner."

This story illustrates that while we must speak the truth and ought to be straightforward, at the same time, we should have the necessary wisdom and tact to say it correctly and in a way that does not offend anyone.

Stories on the Virtue of Straightforwardness

Story: Mahatma Gandhi sleeps peacefully before a Press Conference

Before 1947, India was ruled by the British government. Once, Mahatma Gandhi visited London to negotiate India's independence. He was to have a press conference the following day. As usual, it was expected that the newspersons would try to corner him with their trick questions, and embarrass him.

The newspersons reached the place where he was residing the previous night. They were surprised to find that Mahatma Gandhi was sleeping peacefully.
One of the newspersons asked his Gandhi's secretary, "Is Gandhi not tense or stressed about the press conference tomorrow? Any normal person would not be able to even sleep the previous night."
The secretary replied, "Mahatma Gandhi is not afraid of your questions and is not scared of preparing for the answers. His mind is very clear, and he does not say one thing and mean another. When you ask him any question, he will answer with exactly what is in his mind. So why should he get worried and lose his sleep?"

Story: The Straightforwardness of Queen Mandodarī

Ravana, the evil King of Lanka was blessed to have Mandodari as his queen. Mandodari dutifully served her husband. She always spoke the truth, and said what she thought was in the best interests of her husband. Many a times, she knew that her advice could make Ravana angry because she said what he did not want to hear. But in his heart, he knew that Mandodari was a very straightforward and a truthful woman who had only her husband's best interests in his heart. And therefore, he always had a deep seated respect for her in his heart, and never became annoyed with her, even though he ignored her advice.

When Ravana kidnapped Sita and imprisoned her in the Ashoka Vatika forest, Mandodari counseled him and said, "It is not right to kidnap someone else's wife and imprison her against her own will. Bad karma always recoils on us, and we will all suffer the consequences." But Ravana just ignored her. When Hanuman came to Lanka in search of Sita, and put the city to fire with his burning tale, she again said to him, "If a mere monkey belonging to your enemy can cause so much harm to the kingdom, don't you think that your enemy Rama himself would be extremely powerful to defeat you in no time? Therefore, in your own interests, I urge you to release Sita and send her back to her husband Rama with full honors." But Ravana was too egotistic to listen to her, and just brushed her aside. When Ravana's own brother Vibhīshana fled Lanka and joined the side of Rama, she again pleaded with Ravana to release Sita, so that the lives of the people of Lanka are not endangered.

When Rama prepared to invade Lanka, she again pleaded with him to release Sita, saying, "It is wrong to imprison someone else's wife. Please let her go." But Ravana did not listen. And when her husband finally died on the battlefield, she sat by the side of her corpse, but also realized that no one but her own husband was responsible for his own downfall. Rama was very impressed by her truthfulness and straightforwardness. He blessed her after entering the palace of Lanka. Mandodari is considered one of the five most virtuous women in the Hindu tradition.

Story on Straightforwardness: The Berries of Simple Tribal-woman Shabari

Lord Rama and his brother Lakshmana were travelling through the forests of Southern India in search of Devi Sita, the wife of Lord Rama, who had been kidnapped. They happened to pass by the Ashrama (hermitage) of Sage Matanga. In that hermitage, lived a humble, unintelligent and illiterate tribal woman named Shabari. Everyone thought that she was foolish, and they made fun of her because she was ugly and simple minded. But Shabari always did her work diligently in the Ashrama, served her Guru and remembered the Lord in her heart. On his death bed, the Sage told Shabari that her devotion will be rewarded and Lord Rama would come Himself to her.

Many years later, when she heard that the Lord was coming in the direction of the Ashrama, her joy knew no bounds! She wanted to feed the most delicious fruit and berries to Lord Rama to satiate his hunger. So she went around from one bush of berries to another, plucking berries in a plate. She chewed one-half of each berry. Whenever she tasted a delicious and sweet berry, she would store the non-chewed half in a bowl. When she came across a bitter one, she would throw the whole berry away.

When the Lord arrived, she offered Him a seat, and water, and then gave him the bowl of half-chewed sweet berries. In her excitement, she had forgotten that we must never give dirty food to our guests.

Lakshmana felt disgusted that Shabari should have offered her half-chewed berries to Lord Rama. But the Lord was so touched by the simple devotion and love of the tribal woman, that he ate the berries offered by her with great delight.

After He had finished the berries, Shabari folded her hands in Namaste, and asked the Lord with great devotion – "O Lord! I do not know the correct procedure for worshipping you because I am a very lowly and ugly, illiterate woman born in a very degraded tribe. On top of that, I am not very intelligent or wise. Please tell me how I should worship you, and forgive me if I have offended you in any way."

Lord Rama replied –

> *"O beautiful lady! Listen to me. One should give up all pride due to one's wealth, strength, good qualities, intelligence or due to belonging to good families or caste.*

Instead of seeking for praise from others, we should simply take refuge in Bhakti, and should praise Him alone. Because a person who lacks devotion and faith is like that useless cloud that soars high up in the sky but does not shower any life giving rain. Now I shall explain to you the nine paths of Bhakti. Pay attention and listen to what I say.

First, seek always the company of saintly and virtuous people.
Second, instead of paying attention to useless talk, spend time in listening to the biographies of Lord and Saints.
Third, serve your Guru with humility.
Fourth, give up all crookedness of heart, and sing the praises of the great qualities of God.
Fifth, chant the holy Vedas and recite the sacred mantras, sing bhajans and pray whenever you can.
Sixth, follow what the good people do, keep your senses under control, and do a lot of good deeds.
Seventh, treat everyone as equal and see Me in everyone.
Eighth, do not be greedy and be satisfied with what you get as a result of your labor. Also, do not see faults in others even in your dream, but always see their good side and encourage them.
Ninth, be straightforward, do not show any cunningness, and have faith in Me alone with all your heart.

Rare is that man or woman in which you can see even one of these nine types of devotion. Dear Shabari, everyone makes fun of you. But I can see that in reality, you are the most beautiful woman because all these nine forms of devotion are practiced by you with great humility. Today, I will give you that reward that even Yogis and Saints do not get easily. I shall reveal my Divine form to you."

And then Lord Rama showed his form as Lord Vishnu to her. Shabari's soul then left her body, and merged with Lord Rama. She attained Moksha as a result of her simplicity and simple devotion towards the Lord.

Class Discussion:

Discuss why this behavior is crooked, and not straightforward.

1. You have just completed your HW and are now ready to play some video games. Suddenly, your mother shouts from the kitchen that she needs your help in cleaning dirty dishes. You reply that you are still doing your homework, and then return to your bedroom, leaving the video game behind.
2. Your sister is very good at her studies and gets good grades in all her class tests. This makes you a bit jealous. Everyone in the house loves her. One day, she accidentally spills a glass of milk in her room. You immediately rush out and say loudly, "Sister has spilled her milk, and now there is a big mess on the carpet!"

38. Forgiveness

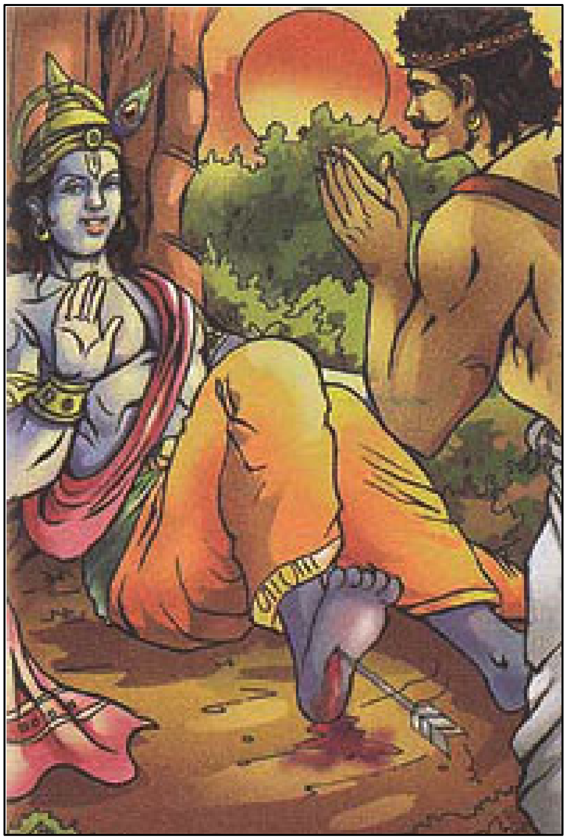
38.1 Why should we Forgive others?

1. Forgiveness is a trait of the Virtuous: Everyone does mistakes, and so do we. Therefore, we should forgive others because we too might have committed the same mistake in the past, or might commit it in the future. Therefore, it is only a low grade person who does not forgive, whereas a high grade person will forgive others for their transgressions.

> "Those who are forgiving have one flaw; there is no second flaw in them. And that flaw is that (ordinary) men consider the forgiving as weak." **Mahābhārata 5.33.47**
>
> "But, this must really be considered a flaw because forgiveness is indeed the greatest strength. Indeed, forgiveness is a virtue of the weak, and an adornment of the powerful." **Mahābhārata 5.33.48a**
>
> "If a dog bites a man, he does not bite the dog back. Therefore, if a wicked man humiliates a virtuous one, the latter should not seek revenge." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 68**

STORY: BHAGAVAN RAMA BECOMES THE KING OF AYODHYA:

When Rama entered the palace, Queen Kaikeyi was very scared. She thought that Rama will blame her for sending him to the forest, and will be very angry with her. But instead, Rama first went to her room, even before seeing his own mother Kaushalya. He bent down and touched her feet to respect her. Kaikeyi was so happy that Rama had forgiven her. Rama said – "Mother, how can I ever be angry with you." Kekeyi then hugged Rama and said – "I am very sorry for what I did. You are so forgiving and respectful, that you are my favorite son. I love you even more than my own son Bharat."



Story: Krishna returns to Vaikuntha, the Abode of Bhagavān Vishnu:

Krishna returned to Dwaraka after the Mahabharata war for good. There, he found that his people, the Yādavas, had become very rich, and had gotten into the habit of taking alcoholic drinks. They would get so intoxicated that they had no sense of what was right and what was wrong. Street fights became common.

Drunken young men would abuse women and Rishis and even kill each other. In one of these fights, even a son of Krishna got killed.

Krishna and Balarāma decided that their time on this earth was now over. Balarāma went to the sea coast and went into deep meditation. His soul left his body and returned to heaven. Krishna wore his yellow clothes and went to a forest close to Dwaraka. As he sat under a tree, a hunter mistook his ankle for the mouth of a deer and shot an arrow. The arrow hit Krishna. When the hunter realized his mistake, he rushed and apologized to Krishna, who immediately forgave him.

2. Forgiveness benefits us more than others: If we do not forgive and forget, the anger and enmity in our heart hurts us more than anyone else. It is just better to move on. Forgiving others often benefits us more than anyone else. If we do not forgive, the cycle of hate and violence continues endlessly and no one gains from it.

> "When (a spark of) fire falls on a place that has no straw, it gets extinguished automatically. And he who never forgives others enmeshes himself with great flaws." **Mahābhārata 5.33.47c**
>
> "Dharma alone is one's greatest benefactor. Forgiveness alone results ultimate peace. Knowledge alone is the supreme insight. Ahimsa alone gives happiness." **Mahābhārata** 5.33.48
>
> ***Some verses from the Dhammapada of Lord Buddha***:
> " "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me", - in those who harbor such thoughts, hatred will never cease." 1.3
> " "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me", - those who dwell not upon such thoughts, are freed of hate." 1.4
> "Never does hatred cease by hating, but hatred ceases by love, this is the Eternal Dharma." 1.5

Story – The Forgiveness of Sage Vashishtha for Sage Vishvamitra

One day, Sage Shakti, the son of Sage Vashishtha, encountered King Kalmashapada coming from the opposite direction on the same path in a forest. The path was narrow and deep and one of them had to retreat to allow the other to proceed forward. King Kalmashapada, being an arrogant and a haughty man, ordered the Sage to go back. Sage Shakti reminded the King that according to Dharmic scriptures, the King must give way to scholars and to Sages.

The King lost his temper at this and he started beating Sage Shakti mercilessly with a whip. Sage Shakti got hurt very badly and was in great pain but he did not hit back. Instead, he cursed the King with the words – "Since you have behaved like a Rākshasa, a Rākshasa indeed will enter your body soon and will make you do all kinds of wrong things, leading you to utter ruin. You will become a cannibal." The King begged the Sage for forgiveness and then the two went their own way.

When Vishwamitra, heard about Shakti's curse, he thought that now was his chance to get even with his rival Sage Vashishtha, the father of Shakti. He knew that Shakti's curse would come true someday. So he thought – "Let me make a Rākshasa, who is obedient to me, enter the body of Kalmashapada, and make him do what I want. Everyone will blame Shakti then, because it is he who cursed the King!"

Vishwamitra summoned a Rākshasa he knew and asks him to enter the body of King Kalmashapada. Under the influence of that Rākshasa, the King killed and ate all of Vashishtha's sons, starting with the murder of Shakti.

When Sage Vashishtha heard that all of his sons had been killed, he was filled with deep grief and decided to end his own life. But not once did he bear any anger towards Vishwamitra, and not once did he desire to take revenge by killing Vishwamitra and his family. In a state of deep sorrow, Sage Vashishtha hurled himself from a cliff, but the bottom of the cliff became as soft as a heap of cotton and his head did not get injured at all. He entered a burning forest, but the fire refused to burn him. Then, he tied a stone around his neck and jumped into the ocean to drown himself, but the waves washed him ashore. The Sage then decided to bind himself in chains and jumped into the river Beas in northern India. But the river currents cut his chains and threw him ashore. Sage Vashishtha then hurled himself in river Satluj in northern India, thinking that the ferocious crocodiles in the river will chew him to death. But even this river respected the Sage so much that it split into a 100 shallow channels, throwing the Sage onto a dry ground. Sage Vashishtha then thought – "Perhaps God does not want me to die by committing suicide. I will go back to my Ashram as I have been away from it for several years."

As he approached his Ashram, he heard the sound of a young child, resembling that of his own son Shakti (when he was a young boy) reciting the Vedas beautifully. His widowed daughter-in-law, who lived in the Ashram explained – "Before my husband Shakti died, I was expecting his child, and this little boy is my womb is that child and your grandson named Parashara." Sage Vashishtha was overjoyed on seeing his grandson, and got a new reason to live. But right then, Kalmashapada appeared and attacked Sage Vashishtha and his pregnant daughter-in-law. But the Sage said a mantra and threw some holy water on the King. As a result, the demon came out of the King's body and fled. Sage Vashishtha did not get angry with the King, even though his father King Sudasa had earlier humiliated Vashishtha and had expelled him from his kingdom. Instead, the Sage lovingly asked him to go back to his kingdom and rule his subjects with justice. Relieved of the Rākshasa, the King went back to his kingdom,

leaving Vashishtha and his daughter in law unharmed.

Soon thereafter, the boy Parashara was born. Sage Vashishtha took care of the little boy for several years. Innocent Parashara thought that Sage Vashishtha, his grandfather, was his father. One day, he actually addressed Vashishtha as 'Dad' in the presence of his mother. As a result, his mother was filled with sorrow and remembered her dead husband. She told Parashara that Vashishtha was actually his grand-father and he should not therefore address him as 'Dad'. She also told him how his own father Shakti was killed in a most cruel manner by King Kalmashapada, who was possessed of a Rākshasa.

When Parashara heard this, he was filled with anger. He said – "This world is so cruel. My father was innocent and yet he was killed for no fault of his. My grandfather was kind to me and yet he hid this fact from me while raising me lovingly. I will destroy this whole world with my spiritual powers because it so full of evil people."

But Sage Vashishtha reasoned with his grandson through stories of great sages that it is not good to be angry and one should give up anger and forgive. And therefore, Parashara decided not to proceed with his decision to destroy the whole world.

Instead, Parashara initiated a great Vedic ceremony (Yajna) as a result of which, the Rākshasas began to die. Worried that Parashara might kill all the Rākshasas, many Sages such as Atri, Pulastya and Kratu approached Parashara and requested him to stop his sacrifice which was killing innocent Rākshasas. They pointed out that although Sage Shakti, his father had been killed, he had now ascended to heaven due to his good deeds, as had the other sons of Sage Vashishtha. The Sages said to Shakti – "Look, even King Kalmashapada has reaped the fruits of his evil actions done under the cruel Rākshasa. There is no point in continuing a slaughter of innocent Rākshasas over an incident that happened such a long time back. Therefore, please stop your ceremony."

Sage Parashara relented and followed the advice of his grandfather and of other Sages. He let go his anger, and forgave the murderers of his father. Instead, he devoted himself completely to his spiritual advancement and to the study of Vedas. In course of time, he became a great Rishi and authored the famous Vishnu Purana, Parashara Smriti, Parashara Hora Shastra, Parashara Kalpasutra, Parashara Panchratra Samhita and many other important scriptures of Hindus. But most important, he gave birth to Sage Veda Vyasa, who became the greatest Rishi of Hindu Dharma.

The story shows that anger and hatred can sometimes lead us into a downward spiral of anger-hatred-revenge-anger-hatred-revenge; eventually leading all of us toward destruction. Anger cannot be fought with anger, and hatred should not be countered with hatred. Instead, just as Sage Vashishtha, we should counter violence, anger and hatred with forgiveness, love and kindness. Often, nothing is gained through anger, hatred and revenge. We should learn to put these things behind us, and instead focus on advancing ourselves in the right direction.

3. Forgiveness can win eternal Friends. Very often, the person who is forgiven is so moved by the kind gesture that he starts seeing his forgiver as a friend or even as a superior to himself.

> "The quality of forgiveness brings everyone under control in this world. What cannot be achieved by forgiving? What can an evil man do to him who holds the sword of peace?"
> **Mahābhārata 5.33.47b**

4. Revenge can hurt innocent by-standers: When we seek revenge, we might see some collateral damage. In other words, some innocent people in addition to the person we want to punish might also get hurt in the cross-fire.

Story: Guru Nanak convinces Sufi Hamzargos to Forgive

Once on his way to the famous pilgrim center of Vaishno Devi in Jammu, Guru Nanak stopped in the city of Sialkot (now in Pakistan). There, he heard that the entire town was terrified of the curse of a Sufi named Hamzargos, who threatened to destroy the entire city by his spiritual powers.

Guru Nanak learned that a childless Hindu couple had earlier approached the Sufi for a child. The Sufi blessed them on the condition that the couple will gift their child to him after its birth. But after the couple became parents, they reneged on their promise. This infuriated the Sufi and he undertook a forty day fast to bring a calamity upon the entire city.

The residents of Sialkot pleaded with Guru Nanak to intercede on their behalf and pacify the angry Sufi. The Guru agreed and approached the Sufi saying, "Why should you punish the entire city for the fault of a single couple? Do you think the destruction of thousands of innocent people, who have nothing to do with that couple's misdeed, will bring you happiness? True happiness and contentment can result not from revenge, but only from forgiveness, love and contentment."

The Sufi was impressed with Guru Nanak's teaching and he gave up his fast as well as forgave the residents of city. The site where Guru Nanak halted and stayed in Sialkot under a tree was later on adorned with a Gurudwara called "Gurudwara Babe di Beri." The Ber (zizyphus jububa) bush and the adjacent well from with the Guru drank water still exist but the whole area is today in shambles due to neglect by the local Muslim population.

5. Forgiveness can benefit the entire Society: Forgetting past enmity and helping someone who has hurt you in the past can benefit many other people. Therefore, sometimes we should forgive our transgressor for the greater good of the society.

Story: Rishi Dadhichi Forgives Indra

Ashvini Kumaras, the twin brothers, were unique Devatas because they knew the knowledge of reviving dead people back to life. Indra thought, "My advantage over them is that I have spiritual wisdom, which they do not possess. But if they acquire that spiritual knowledge too, then they might threaten me and

become the Kings of the Devatas in my place." Therefore out of fear and jealousy, Indra ordered that no one should teach spiritual wisdom to the Ashvini Kumaras, or that teacher's head would split into a thousand pieces.

The Ashvini Kumaras were upset when they heard of Indra's decree. They went to a very pious Rishi Dadhichi and requested, "O Rishi, no one dares to teach us the spiritual wisdom of the Vedic scriptures. Therefore, we are requesting you to stand up to Indra. We will replace your head with that of a horse, and when that horse head splits, we will replace it again with your original head." Out of kindness, Rishi Dadhichi agreed, and taught the spiritual wisdom to the twin brothers. As soon as he had done so, Indra hurled an axe and beheaded the Rishi. The Kumaras then re-grafted the head of the Rishi back to his torso when the horse head had broken into pieces. Rishi Dadhichi regained his life and his original form.

Several years later, an evil demon named Vritra grew very powerful and he began to trouble all the residents of heaven. Finally, he even invaded heaven and drove out Indra. Rendered homeless, Indra appealed to Bhagavān Vishnu to help him. But Vishnu replied, "Vritra can be killed only with a weapon made from the bones of a Rishi who has meditated a long time, who is pure and therefore whose bones have become charged with spiritual power. At this time, Dadhichi is the only Rishi whose bones can give a strong enough weapon."

Indra became very nervous now, because he had earlier beheaded Dadhichi. But nevertheless, he went to Rishi Dadhichi and begged for forgiveness and told him the reason for his visit. Rishi Dadhichi smiled and said, "Aren't you the same person who had tried to kill me earlier? But it is the duty of Rishis to forgive and forget. And even more important, if I do not forgive you and do not give you my bones, then because of your past actions, many innocent Devatas and other creatures will suffer. Therefore, I will forgive you and permit you to take my bones."

Rishi Dadhichi then sat in meditation, till his soul left his body and merged with Bhagavān Vishnu. Indra then used a weapon crafted from his bones, and was able to defeat Vritra in a battle.

The story of Dadhichi shows how we should forget old rivalries and enmities and should be willing to sacrifice ourselves when our society and when our loved ones are faced with a great danger.

6. Forgiveness is the Virtue of Bhagavān and His Saints: The example of Avatāras and Saints shows us the virtue of forgiveness and we ought to emulate them.

Story: Which is the greatest form of Bhagavan?

One day, all the Rishis met together to decide which form of Bhagavan is the greatest. Rishi Bhrigu said, “Let me go and meet Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. I will test them and find out which of these three is the greatest.”

First, Bhrigu went to see Brahma who was reading scriptures. Brahma was the father of Bhrigu, but Bhrigu did not even say **Namaste** to his father. Brahma got very angry and said to Bhrigu, “You are a foolish man. You do not even have good manners even though you are my own son.” But Sarasvati, the wife of Brahma, asked her husband to calm down.

Then, Bhrigu went to Mountain Kailash to see Bhagavan Shiva. When Shiva saw Bhrigu arrive, He rushed to embrace Bhrigu. But Bhrigu said to Shiva, “Stop, do not hug me. You have ashes on your body and are so dirty. I do not want to embrace you.” Shiva was so annoyed that he lifted his weapon to kill Bhrigu. But Devi Parvati requested Shiva to calm down.

Rishi Bhrigu then went to Vaikuntha, were Bhagavan Vishnu was taking a nap. Bhrigu went close to Vishnu and suddenly kicked His chest, without any reason. Bhagavan Vishnu immediately woke up. But instead of getting angry at Bhrigu, he smiled and said, “Respected Bhrigu, I am sorry for hurting you. My chest is very strong and hard. I hope your foot did not get hurt. Let me give your foot a massage.”

Rishi Bhrigu was very impressed with Bhagavan Vishnu’s behavior. He went and told all the other Rishis that Bhagavan Vishnu is greatest because He does not get angry, and forgives even those who hurt Him.

Note that this story does not really mean that Vishnu is superior to Shiva. The different Forms of Bhagavān merely enact these plays to set up a good example and teach us good things.

We humans tend to learn faster if an example in the form of a story is given, and this is why Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva enacted this incident to convey the virtue of forgiveness to us.

38.2 When should we Forgive, When should not Forgive?

We cannot gift the Statue of Liberty to anyone, because we do not own it. We can gift only those items that belong to us. In the same way, we can forgive someone only if we ourselves are the victim of the crime, not if someone else is. For example, if we have not lost any family member in the 9-11 attack, we cannot pretend to take the high road and say, "I forget Osama bin Laden."

Also, some crimes can be forgiven, others cannot be forgiven. Some people can be forgiven, and others should not be forgiven. In this regard, the following words from the Mahabharata give us very reasonable advice: Draupadi told Yuddhishthira the following words of advice from Prahlāda to his grandson Bali:

> "*Let me tell you when you should be patient with people who have done something bad to you. If someone who has previously done good to you now does a not too great harm to you, then forgive him in consideration of his earlier favor (but if he does a great harm to you, then do not forgive him). Wrong doers who commit a wrong because they did not realize that their act was bad should be forgiven, because it is not always easy to find guidance on what is wrong and what is correct. But offenders who do a wrong with full knowledge and understanding but pretend to have done it unknowingly should be punished, even if their offence was small because they are hypocrites. The first offence of the wrong-doer should be forgiven, but the second one, even if it is small, should be punished. If someone does a wrong in ignorance, he should be forgiven but only after it is determined that the wrong-doer did it out of ignorance. In general, it is better to be gentle than harsh because the gentle can overcome the hard hearted, nothing is impossible to achieve for a gentle person and because gentleness is more powerful than harshness. One should decide on whether to punish or forgive after looking into one's own strengths and weaknesses, and after considering the time and place. Any action taken at the wrong time or place will fail, therefore wait for the correct place and time before acting. Sometimes, we may have to forgive the culprit for the fear of making the general public very angry.*" [***Mahabharata. Vana Parva, chapter 29***].

At times, we Hindus have not followed this advice and have to pay a heavy price for it. The culprit who was forgiven then mis-used the fact that he was let go, and came back to inflict even more damage and harm upon us. E.g., Durgadas Rathore, a Rajput official in the kingdom of Jodhpur had a perfect chance to kill the bigoted Emperor Aurangzeb, but out of magnanimity, he let him go. The same Aurangzeb wreaked havoc on other Hindu kingdoms in the country for several years thereafter.

Similarly, in the year 1191 CE during the first battle of Tarain, the troops of Prithviraj Chauhan, the Rajput King of Delhi, defeated Muhammad Ghori but allowed him to flee back to Afghanistan. Ghori returned home and started preparing for the next battle. He invaded India again the very next year and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Rajput armies. Prithviraj Chauhan was captured and killed! This effectively ended Hindu rule over much of north India, and started the very oppressive rule of Muslim

Turk rulers for several centuries. So this example shows that we ought to be very careful in forgiving others, lest our magnanimity comes back to haunt us.

38.3 How Many Times should we forgive?

Some people believe that we should keep forgiving others. However, this advice applies only to saints like Sant Ekanath, whose story is given below.

Story: The Forgiveness of Sant Ekanath

"Once, as Ekanatha was coming out of the river after his bath in the Godavari, a Muslim spat on him. Ekanatha however, was not in the least perturbed and simply returned to the river and bathed again. This happened again and again, and still Ekanatha did not get angry. Finally, the Muslim understood that Ekanatha was not an ordinary person and apologized. Ekanatha simply replied that he himself was in the wrong to get in the Muslim's way, and that he had had the benefit of taking so many baths in the Godavari. Then he said, "Let Allah bless you!" The Muslim was surprised and asked him why he did it. Ekanatha replied, "Brother, God is One, whether you call Him Allah or Krishna or any other name you like. He abides in you, in me, and in all the objects on this earth. If one tries, one can see Him everywhere, as I see you and you see me.""[43]

Points for Discussion:

1. In the New Testament of the Bible, a disciple asks Jesus Christ – "Lord, how many times should we forgive others – seven or seventy?" Jesus replied, "Neither seven nor seventy, but seven times seventy." Discuss whether you agree with this statement or not. If you were in the place of Sant Ekanath, would you have forgiven the spitting gentleman? Why or why not?
2. Should a Sadhu who has no home or possessions or even a family to take care of be more forgiving thank a father who has to take care of his wife, children and his possessions?

[43] Pravrajika Suddhatmaprana, p. 162. According to other versions however, the spitter was a disgruntled Brahmana Ramabhatt who wanted to humiliate Sant Ekanath.

39. FORBEARANCE AND ACCOMMODATION

39.1 What is Forbearance?

This term literally means 'to accommodate', or 'to forgive and forbear.' The following are the four main ways in which we can practice the virtue of Kshānti in our day to day lives -

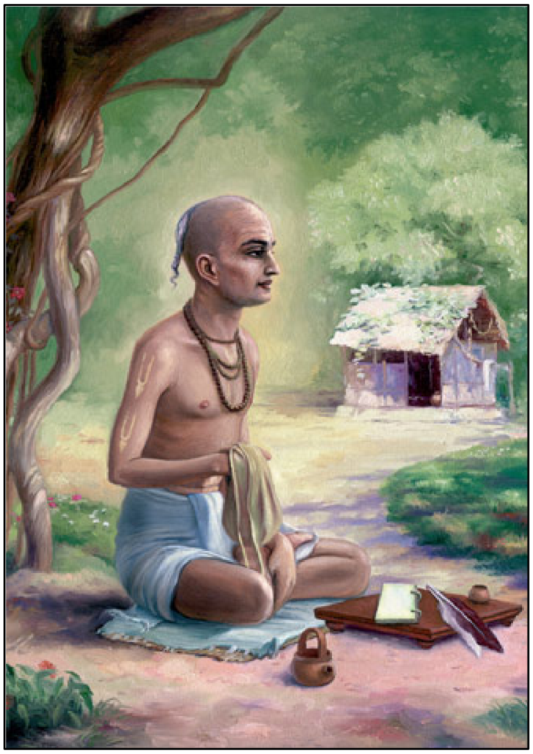
1. To accept and tolerate the uncomfortable or pleasant situations or people that we encounter in everyday life without complaining or feeling upset.
2. To accept diversity of opinions, practices and cultures as a fact of life, and not impose our beliefs and standards on everyone.
3. To be patient with, forgiving towards and tolerant of people whom we do not agree with, or we do not like or who have tried to harm us.
4. To have the understanding that everything passes away with time, but the underlying Truth of the soul and Paramātman is always constant.

39.2 Why should we practice Forbearance and Accommodation?

1. Because people are different from each other, and diversity is a fact of life. Our way need not be the only right way, nor is it going to work for everyone.
2. Different people do have different understanding of things, different levels of intelligence, and different ethical and spiritual values. We cannot get incensed when things are not done our way, and should learn to accept situations which are different from what we are used to.
3. Kshanti stems from tolerance, forgiveness, compassionate understanding and a desire for harmony and peace. When we patiently accommodate the differences amongst ourselves and forgive others, it prevents us from wasting our time, emotions, efforts and resources on avoidable and useless and trivial conflicts. If we continue to react to every difficult situation or person, we will be forever stressed out. On the other hand, if we adhere to Kshānti, then we can focus on things that are really important in our lives, rather than get distracted all the time over trivial matters.
4. If we are not forbearing, we become irritable and land up annoying everyone around us. Forbearance gives us the ability to be indifferent to the minor flaws of others. A forbearing person keeps a pleasant smile on his face, and helps the other person develop and grow in his life. In this way, he gains a friend and a comrade for himself.

Story: Shri Jīva Goswami learns the virtue of Forbearance

Once, a scholarly Pandit who was a great debater arrived at Vrindavana. The locals told him about Sri Sanatana Goswami (1488 – 1558 CE), a great saint, and a great scholar of that holy town. The Pandit approached Sri Sanatana and challenged him to a debate, "Either you defeat me in a debate on the scriptures, or you should write a declaration that I am a greater scholar than you."



Sri Sanatana Goswami was always immersed in the devotion of Krishna. Although he could have defeated the Pandit easily, he did not want to puncture the Pandit's enthusiasm and self-respect. And so, he wrote the declaration that the Pandit was a greater scholar, and handed the same to him."

The Pandit was overjoyed. He went all over the town, accompanied by musicians who chanted the praises of his scholarship. Suddenly, Sri Jiva Goswami, the nephew of Sri Sanatana, and a saint and a scholar in his own right, heard about the Pandit having defeated his uncle. He approached the Pandit and challenged him to a debate. The Pandit lost. Still angry at him for having coerced his uncle to write the declaration, Jiva Goswami snatched all the declarations of victory that the Pandit used to carry with him, and forced him to write a new one saying he was inferior in his learning to Jiva Goswami.

When this news reached Sri Sanatana Goswami, he was very upset with his nephew and said, "Tell Jiva that I do not want to see his face again. He has destroyed the enthusiasm for learning, and the self-respect of a Pandit. I have no use of the pride of learning, but for some people, that is a good driving force to make them study and learn continuously. Therefore, what he did to that Pandit was not right." Sri Jiva Goswami was very repentant at what he had done. And it was only after several penances and pleadings that Sri Sanatana eventually forgave his nephew and met him.[44]

This beautiful story demonstrates that in this world, there are people at different levels of spiritual attainment. Some of those who are at lower levels, become proud and small accomplishments, just as little kids feel pride in being able to read their first sentences, or when they are praised by their teacher. But this does not mean that we should stoop to the level of these people and become like them. And even more important, we should not look down upon them or humiliate them, because at their stage of understanding, pride and rewards are indeed big motivators to keep them going on the path of spiritual enlightenment. They who are at higher levels should constantly encourage those who are below them, with love, compassion and understanding, rather than 'show them their place.' Only a heartless adult will humiliate little children who are still learning the alphabet by showing off his own learning in front of them.

Discussion: How can you practice forbearance towards your younger sibling who misbehaves all the time, and tries to compete with you even though he does not know as much as you do, and is also not as good as you in studies and sports?

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[44] Swami Akhandananda Saraswati (1966), p. 362

40. Equanimity and Steadiness

40.1 What is Equanimity and Steadiness?

Equanimity or being Level-Headed means to -

- Treat enemy and friend alike – not hate an enemy or discriminate against him, and not be partial towards a friend.
- Treat criticism and praise alike – not get puffed up with praise, or a punctured balloon when criticized.
- Treat happiness and sorrow alike – not become too dejected when sad, and too excited when happy.
- Treat cold and heat alike – not become too irritable when it is very hot and uncomfortable, and not get too scared and frigid when it is too cold.
- Treat success and failure alike – not get too elated when you succeed, or become depressed when you fail.

The characteristic of a wise man who has knowledge and wisdom in the right measure is this- he does not become despondent in adversity, and does not become arrogant in times of prosperity. **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 85**

Whether men proficient in worldly wisdom praise him or criticize him, whether he gains wealth or loses it, whether he knows that he will live for several years or whether he will die soon, a person who is steadfast on the path of justice and virtue is never swayed by all these considerations. **Nītishataka of Rishi Bhartihari, verse 83**

40.2 Why should we practice Equanimity and keep a Steady Mind?

<u>REASON 1:</u> **For keeping our Mental Sanity, because these ups and downs in life are really temporary.**

A contemporary spiritual leader gives the important reasons for keeping a steady state of mind in the following beautiful words:

> "All human beings face the ups and downs of life. They are part of the human existence and cannot be avoided. The question is, are we going to lose our peace of mind and become unstable as we face these highs and lows on the roadway of life? If we let ourselves become affected by everything that comes our way in life, we will feel as if we are on a perpetual roller coaster. We will move from the heights of ecstasy to the depths of despair and back to ecstasy again from one moment to the next. These constant variations often lead to a sense of fear, anxiety, and panic because we never

know what will happen next. Over time, this state of fear and anxiety becomes a part of our nature and we are not able to relax."[45]

REASON 2: **These changing situations do not really affect the real 'Me'.**

So, there is a practical reason for practicing equanimity. But in addition there is also a spiritual reason – and this reason is that all these changing situations really touch only our body, which is temporary anyway. These changes can never affect our soul, the eternally glowing light inside us.

He further explains with an example - Many a times, our car breaks down and we have to take it to a mechanic for repairs. The car starts running again. We do not break down mentally when our car breaks down, because we know that the car is not meant to last forever. Moreover, the car merely takes us around from one place to another. It is not the end of life if the car breaks down. We should have exactly the same attitude towards our own bodies. The body is merely a vehicle to take the soul forward in its journey towards Bhagavān. If our body falls sick, or if we start suffering from some other mental disability, we must not become disheartened and depressed because no disease or illness can touch the soul. It can affect only the body, which is merely a temporary vehicle to seat our soul.[46]

Bhagavān Krishna, for this very spiritual reason, starts his message of the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna with these very words -

> Cold and Heat, Happiness and Sorrow – these are all result from a temporary contact of material objects with our sense organs (and mind). They are never permanent. Therefore, we should endure them patiently. **Gita 2.14**

Read the chapter titled 'Jnana: Spiritual Knowledge' for understanding this point better.

Story: This too shall Pass

"A king called together all his wise counselors and advisors. He posed to them a question: "O advisors, I wish that my inner self were filled with stability. I find that I am always subject to the ups and downs of life and they throw me off balance. Can you find something that will help me feel joyful when in a state of unhappiness, and something that will remind me of sadness when I am in a state of happiness? Find me something that I can keep with me to help me stay in a calm, stable mood despite whatever is happening around me."

The advisors put their heads together and thought long and hard about what the king requested. Finally, they came up with a solution. They went back to the king.

The king saw them approaching with a small box.

"We found a solution for you, O King," the advisors said. "Open the box."

[45] Rajinder Singh, p. 2
[46] Rajinder Singh, p. 7

When the king opened it, he found within a small ring.

"Look at the inscription," they told him.

The inscription in the ring said, "This too shall pass.""[47]

The moral of the story is explained in this way,

"These four simple words [This too shall pass] helped the king and can help us maintain a sense of balance when we face the highs and lows of life. When we become to ecstatic and happy, we need to remember that things will not always be that way, and we should not be disappointed and depressed when the happy times pass. When we become too depressed or unhappy, these four words can serve as a reminder to us that the pain is only temporary, and happy days will come again.

We can stay at an even keel through the storms and sunny days of life by finding a calm center. We can reach this still point through meditation and prayer. Within us are all the riches of divinity. We are not just the body and the mind, but the soul [Ātmā]. The soul is filled with Light, love and joy. Why? It is connected all the time with the source of divinity, the creative Power, which is all Light, love, and joy. The creative Power and the soul are made of the same essence. If we spend some time daily within the silence of our soul, we will be connected with a place of bliss. Then the outer circumstances of our life will not affect us. We will not be troubled by the temporary phases of life. We can learn to find a still center, filled with peace and balance, which will provide us with permanent happiness despite the outer variations of life."[48]

Story: Sant Lalleshwari's Two Pieces of Cloth

Lalleshwari (1320 -1389 CE) was a great devotee of Shiva who lived in Kashmir at a time when the Hindu rule in the region was replaced by Islamic rule. She was married off at the age of 12.

Unfortunately, in her husband's home, she was ill-treated very badly by her mother in law, who did not even give her enough food to eat. She just hoped that Lalleshwari would die, but it didn't happen. When Lalleshwari turned 26, her mother in law and her husband alleged that she was a woman of bad

[47] Rajinder Singh, p. 4
[48] Rajinder Singh, p. 4-5

character. She was dragged by her cruel husband to the market place and humiliated in front of everyone. Now Lalleshwari could take it no more. No one in the entire society had come to defend her when she was ill-treated all these years. Therefore, she decided to turn her back to the society, and turn towards Bhagavān Shiva.

Lalleshwari began roaming from pace to place, singing her beautiful words on true Bhakti to Shiva, and related spiritual matters. People were not used to seeing a woman Sadhu in those days and therefore, most people abused her as she went down the streets begging for food. One day, someone threw a clod of mud on her, but she just did not respond, as usual. She just continued to sing the praises of Shiva.

A devotee of hers, a cloth-merchant, pulled her into his shop before she got more abuses from the people collected on the street. He reasoned with her, "Why don't you live like other women. Or if you do not want to live like other wives, why don't you live far away from everyone in cave. What do you get from all these abuses and attacks when you come to the towns, singing about Shiva?"

Lalleshwari just smiled, and asked him to get two pieces of cloth that were equal in weight. The shopkeeper cut and weighed two pieces of cloth, and gave them to her.

She threw one over her left shoulder, and the other over her right shoulder. She said, "Today, I will walk through the town again. Every time someone abuses me, I will tie a knot on the left piece of cloth. And when someone praises me or blesses me, I will tie a knot on the right piece of cloth."

When she returned that evening, it was clear that there were more knots on the left cloth, because many more people abused her compared to those who recognized her true spiritual worth. The shopkeeper said, "See, I told you so." Lalleshwari asked him to bring the weighing balance, and weight the two pieces again.

As expected, the two pieces again weight exactly equal to each other. Lalleshwari smiled at the shop-keeper and said, "Look, although one cloth had more knots than the other, the two pieces still weigh the same. This shows that their difference is only external and superficial. In reality, both the pieces still have the same amount of yarn, the same amount of color. In the same way, things like praise and criticism, sorrow and happiness, pleasure and pain are all superficial like the knots on the cloth. They cannot change the nature or the worth of the soul, which is eternal and unchangeable. I have given my life to Shiva, and my soul is one with Him now. Therefore, whether I get more praise or more criticism, it does not bother me because I know that these all are like superficial knots, which cannot affect my soul."

The sayings of Lalleshwari are collected in verses called 'Lalla-vakhs'. Although 95% of Kashmiris were converted to Islam in the subsequent centuries, often by force and persecution, her sayings are still the source of almost 30% of the proverbs in the Kashmiri language.

REASON 3: **Only a person with Equanimity is fit for Spiritual Progress.** An unstable minded person can never grow spiritually.

Story: The Focus and Concentration of Shukadeva

Vyasa was the greatest Rishi of his times. He lived in Kurukshetra northern India and in Badarika Ashrama in the Himalayas. He had a son named Shukadeva, who showed great spiritual advancement even as a child and a teenager.

Once, Vyasa sent his son to study under King Janaka of Videha, who was renowned for his spiritual wisdom and knowledge. Shukadeva travelled almost 1000 km by foot from his father's home to listen to the sermons in Videha. King Janaka, through his spiritual powers, learned beforehand that Vyasa's son is coming to study under him, and he made preparations accordingly.

When Shukadeva reached the palace, the guards (as instructed) hardly paid any attention to him. They allowed him in to the assembly of the King, where he was offered a seat. For three days, King Janaka gave a sermon on Hindu spirituality. Shukadeva also listened intently, but no one paid attention to him even though he was the son of a great Rishi.

From the fourth day onwards however, things changed completely. The royal courtiers and officials gave Shukadeva a grand reception and welcomed him with pricey clothing, jewels and requested him to a lavish room for his stay. The teenager Shukadeva lived in his new lavish surroundings for 8 days. Janaka had asked his servants to keep a watch on Shukadeva during all of the 11 days. The servants reported, "King, Shukadeva remained calm and composed throughout the time. He never showed any anger or frustration the first three days when no one gave any attention towards him. And in the following 8 days, he showed no joy or excitement when we showered him with presents and attention, and catered to each one of his needs."

King Janaka then sent a request to Shukadeva to come to the royal court for a meeting. When Shukadeva appeared, the king was seated on his magnificent throne. Beautiful girls danced all around to keep everyone entertained. Janaka said to Shukadeva, "I am offering you a bowl of milk filled to the brim. I want you to place this bowl on your head, and make seven rounds inside the room around all of us. If you do not spill a single drop, then alone I will offer to teach you my wisdom."

Shukadeva placed the bowl on his head cheerfully. While he walked around the room, the dancing girls continued with their song and dance. The crowd gathered in the room was talking loudly and paying attention to what the boy was doing. But Shukadeva did not get distracted by anything and successfully walked around the room 7 times without getting distracted by the dancing girls, the music, the richly dressed courtiers, the comments of other onlookers or by the worry that he will not succeed.

When the King saw Shukadeva finish this feat remarkably, he said, "Dear boy, there is nothing that I need to teach you. You do not feel insulted or frustrated when people ignore you or give you no importance. You do not feel excited when you are surrounded by beautiful clothes, jewels, music, dance etc. This is the main quality that a person needs to have to advance spiritually. And in fact, only a

spiritually advanced person can show this kind of equipoise and concentration. You have renounced mentally all attachments, attractions and aversions. Therefore, you do not need to study under me."

Janaka was correct indeed, because Shukadeva became renowned as a great Rishi in his own right, and became the narrator of Shrimad Bhagavata Purana to King Pareekshit later. Shukadeva attained Moksha in his father Vyasa's own lifetime.

REASON 4: **Everything in the world is not under our control.**

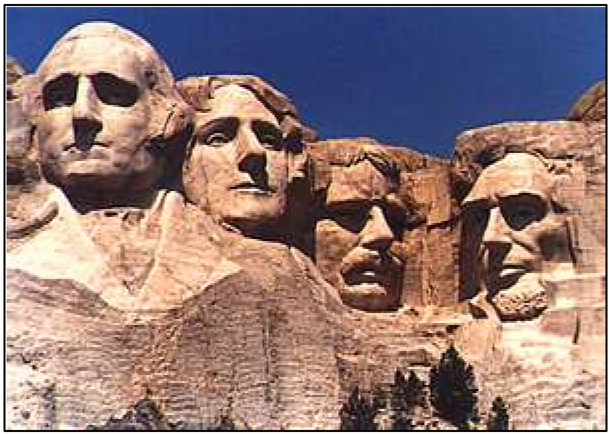
Heat, cold, success, failure, praise, insult etc. – these often come to us due to factors that we cannot control. E.g., can you control when it will rain or when it will stop snowing? Therefore, if we cannot control some things, then why get upset over them? Our getting upset over these things will not change them. It will only make our mind more depressed. Instead, we should think that these are only temporary situations, and there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

Likewise, as we learned in the lesson on pride, there are many factors that lead to our success, and all of these factors were not under our command. Therefore, success and praise should not make us arrogant and proud. Instead, we should accept them with grace and equanimity and understand that tomorrow the opposite might happen and we could face poverty, failure, rejection or sorrow.

This reason is also so well exemplified in the life of Sant Lalleshwari.

REASON 5: **A lack of equanimity on our part forces us to go for short term gains, and therefore we run losses in the long term. Equanimity is necessary to show qualities of Fortitude and Commitment.**

It takes years of hard work and overcoming numerous set-backs to make anything that is magnificent and enduring. For example, Mt Rushmore sculptures were not carved in a single day. They took decades. The gentleman who left this enduring monument faced many problems and even opposition from the government. But he did not get dejected with all the hurdles that he had faced. Instead, he practiced equanimity and remained committed to his cause. After several decades of hard work, he and his helpful supporters left us with a world famous monument.



A great example in the Hindu tradition is the multi-generation effort of 3 kings one after the other to bring the waters of Ganga to the earth. If they had lost hope and given up due to temporary setbacks, the river would not have flown in its present channel, and Hindu civilization would not have flourished in northern India. You will read this story in the next chapter.

40.3 Equanimity for Students: Discussion

Equanimity is a very useful Hindu ideal for students. Here are some situations in which you can apply this value. Discuss how you will reason in your mind and practice equanimity in these scenarios -

1. You perform miserably in a test and your grade gets lowered.
2. You lose a sporting competition and do not make it to your school team.
3. You are not selected to join the cheerleader squad.
4. Your girlfriend or your boyfriend breaks up with you.
5. Your best friend humiliates you by backbiting.
6. Due to some illness, you gain a lot of weight and get weird looking marks on your face. A nasty classmate sends a nasty text message to all your classmates alleging falsely that you have a contagious and a dangerous disease.
7. You are locked in an intense tennis competition for the finals game. Your opponent is also someone that bullies you in the classroom. You win the game and the championship. You get tempted to go up to him and get even with him now for all his bullying.

Further Topics for Discussion:

1. The lives of child actors, who got great fame and wealth at an early age, become very sad and tragic when they become adults who are no longer famous. Why do you think this happens? How do you think these child celebrities lead happy lives through their old age?
2. We are used to seeing images of famous athletes and rock stars on TV, smiling and laughing, and loving the attention they get. But very often, we read that one of them committed suicide. What do you think is the cause of these apparently happy people committing suicide because their life became so unbearable? What values should these celebrities have practiced so that they were no driven to ending their lives? Do you think that they were as happy as they looked on the TV screen?

41. Commitment or Dedication (Nishthā) & Fortitude or Perseverance (Dhriti)

41.1 What are Fortitude and Commitment?

Fortitude or Perseverance means that we should not lose hope and confidence in a difficult time. We should not feel dejected. Rather, we should be persistent in reaching our goal and continue to work hard with courage and confidence. A person who does not have fortitude can never be successful in his life. He will never take any risks and at the slightest adversity, he will give up.

It is the presence or absence of fortitude that distinguishes a great person from an ordinary one. Therefore Sage Bhartrihari has said:

> Those who are low grade do not start any work, scared of the obstacles that they will face in accomplishing their task. The medium grade people start their tasks, but then stop before completing them when they encounter difficulties on the way. But the highest category of people never give up once they have started a task, and do not stop before completing it despite numerous obstacles on their way. **Nitishataka of Bhartrihari**

A person who has fortitude is very strong willed and always keeps a positive attitude. He does not lose hope and does not give up easily. Queen Vidula of the kingdom of Sauvira (modern Multan region in Pakistan) said the following words to her son, who had lost his kingdom, to encourage him to fight back and regain his territory:

> Queen Vidula said (to her son) – "I will definitely be victorious", with this resolve in your mind, you must get up, give despondency and become always engaged in actions that get bring glory and power to you. **Mahābhārata 5.135.29b-30a**

Commitment and Dedication mean that we should really believe in the importance of the task that we are doing. When we have this belief, we work whole-heartedly and with full enthusiasm to complete our task, no matter how much time and effort it takes.

Never Give Up, Continue to Exert*:* Life is like a garden. To keep the garden beautiful and fresh at all times, we must constantly plant and trim our flowering plants. But at the same time, we can never ignore the weeds that can grow and choke our flowers. Therefore, we must tend our flowers and also pluck the weeds regularly. The human mind is very fertile, like a fertilized garden. To keep it pure and beautiful, we should constantly engage ourselves in good activities (abhyāsa) and also keep making a constant effort to steer clear of bad things (vairāgya). We can never lower our guard, because it takes just a moment for negative thoughts to enter our minds.

Thomas Edison, the famous inventor had once said, “Success is 100% perspiration, and only 1% inspiration.” Indeed, the most successful people in the world are not necessarily those who are very intelligent, but the ones who keep trying to improve themselves.

41.2 The Four Vows of a Dedicated and a Persevering Person:

Hindu teachers suggest that we should follow these four vratas (vows) in our lives to the maximum possible extent so that we remain dedicated and persevering:[49]

1. Kamala-Vrata (The Vow of the Lotus): Although the lotus emerges from the muddy bottom of ponds, it remains pure and does not get soiled with mud at all. It remains dry and does not get wet even though it blooms out of water. Similarly, even while living in this world that has a fair amount of evil and sorrow, we should always remain virtuous and cheerful.

2. Chandana-Vrata (The Vow of Sandalwood): When a piece of wood from the sandalwood tree is ground, it continues to emit a wonderful fragrance down to the last particle. Similarly, no matter how much hardship we have to endure, we should always continue to radiate the fragrance of a positive attitude.

3. Ikshudanda-Vrata (The Vow of Sugar Cane): The cane of the sugar plant is crushed and mauled in many ways but it always yields a delicious and pleasant syrup, never a bitter or poisonous fluid. Likewise, no matter how much we are suppressed, we must never become bitter and should continue to exude blessings and good-wishes.

4. Hema-Vrata (The Vow of Gold): Gold is heated and smelted into many shapes but it never loses its brilliance. In fact, it ends up as a beautiful ornament. Similarly, no matter how much we are tormented, we should forbear and continue to show the brilliance of our wisdom, knowledge and virtues. These torments and tribulations will then transform us into something that is even more beautiful, something that is better than what we were.

41.3 A Good Student is as persevering as a Crow:

In Section II of the book, we had learned that one of the good qualities of a good student is that he keeps trying as a crow. What does this really mean? A fable of the Greek person named Aesop, who lived around the 6th cent BCE, wrote a beautiful fable to explain this:

Story: The Thirsty Crow

A thirsty crow encountered a jar of water. But, the water level in the jar was very low and the crow’s beak could not reach it. The crow flew and picked up a pebble and dropped it into the jar. He made numerous trips in this way, till the collection of pebbles in the jar

[49] Swami Akhandanand Saraswati (1970), pp. 20-21

filled the jar sufficiently to raise the level of water. The cow was now able to drink it and quench his thirst.

Another inspiring story is given below -

Story: The Disabled Person who did not Give Up

A young man went to college with a severe physical handicap. He had to go around in a wheel chair because he had cerebral palsy as a child. Yet, he was always cheerful and positive. He also excelled in studies and regularly won the highest academic honors.

One day, his friend asked in amazement, "Despite your disability, how are you so cheerful and positive all the time, and how are you able to excel in your studies?"

The young man replied, "My disease may have touched my body. But I did not allow it to touch my heart and my soul."[50]

41.4 Why Should we show Fortitude and Commitment?

REASON 1: **Bhagavān can be reached only by the Bhakta who shows fortitude and perseverance.**

Story: Whom Does Bhagawan Vishnu grant Moksha?

Once, Sage Narada was on his way to Vaikuntha, the abode of Bhagavān Vishnu when he encountered two Yogis meditating on Vishnu. They asked Narada to check with Vishnu as to how many more lives they would have to experience and meditate before they attained Moksha.

Sage Narada did, as requested. On his way back from Vaikuntha, he told the first Yogi, "Bhagawan Vishnu said that you will be reborn as many times as there are leaves on the tree under which you are meditating. So continue meditating for that number of lives, and then your Atman will merge with that of Vishnu." The Yogi replied, "Blessed I am that Bhagavān Vishnu has put a limit to the number of my rebirths. I will now continue to meditate with even greater enthusiasm, because I see light at the end of the tunnel. I am just happy with the fact that Vishnu is pleased with me."

The moment he had said this, Bhagavān Vishnu appeared and said, "My child! I will grant you Moksha here and now because you meditated not for any selfish motive including Moksha, but for My pleasure. Indeed, Moksha is only for those who lose their ego and attachment to their actions and fruits because

[50] Rajinder Singh, p. 6

they offer them solely to Me. You have all these qualities, and therefore, you do not have to be reborn even once anymore."

Then, Narada went further and encountered the second Yogi to whom he said, "You have earned the favor of Vishnu. The Lord of the Universe said that you need to be reborn only 5 more lives now." The second Yogi, upon hearing this, fumed and fretted. He exclaimed, "I cannot believe that all my effort has so far been a waste. I spent my entire life meditating on Vishnu to get Moksha, and all I get is this! I think I deserved better. I do not have the patience to meditate for more time, forget about five more lives." He rolled his meditation mat and gave up his faith in Vishnu. As a result, he became distracted from the path of Moksha. In fact, he never had selfless faith in Vishnu because he was meditating only with the fruit of Moksha in mind.

REASON 2: **If we give up too soon, we are left behind or run over in the World**

The Parable of the Eagle and the Sparrows:

"A beautiful eagle was flying high up in the skies. Two sparrows, sitting on the ground watched the eagle soar into the sky and float majestically at an incredible height. The younger sparrow felt waves of despair rise in its heart, "What is the use of flying at all," it said to the other bird. "If we fly, we should fly like the eagle. If we can't, it is better to burn away our wings. I am not going to fly at all hereafter." The older bird replied: "Brother, this is not the right attitude. We, too, have wings. And, we can fly. We should not yield to despair. Let us do what we can. There is beauty in that. Saying so, the older bird flew away. The younger one had not got over its dejection, when a hunter came along and easily caught it.

A saint is ever soaring into the Divine into the Divine and floating in the transcendental regions of Divine Bliss. All people cannot do that. But everyone has been endowed by God with some good qualities and some talents. Wisdom lies in utilizing them as much as you can. If you do not, you are likely to fall a prey to Tamas and sink lower in the ocean of Samsara."[51]

[51] Swami Sivananda. 2004. *Parables of Swami Sivananda*. The Divine Life Society. Tehri-Garhwal (Uttaranchal), India. Pages 39-40 (with slight modifications).

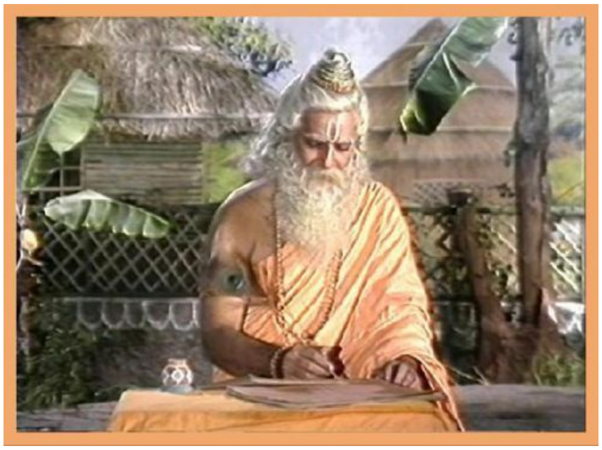
> *"Let a man lift himself by himself; because we alone are our own friend and we are also our own enemy."* ***Bhagavad Gita 6.5***

REASON 3: **If we are not committed and persevering, we can never improve ourselves.** Even the most hardened criminal can become virtuous, and the most dullard student can become intelligent if he keeps trying.

We had earlier read the story of Arjuna and how he became a good archer. We also read how Panini and Varadaraja became scholars. Here is another story of a murdered, who became a Sage that wrote the Ramayana, because he was determined that he wants to become a better person.

Story: The Dacoit Ratnākar becomes Sage Valmiki:

Sage Valmiki is called the 'Adi Kavi' or the first poet in the Sanskrit language. He wrote the Ramayana, the story of the life of Lord Rama in 24,000 verses. The Ramayana has become so popular that even outside of India, people in Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, Laos, Malaysia, China, Japan and so on have their own versions of Ramayana. But, it is the Ramayana of Sage Valmiki that is the original Ramayana and other versions are copies of it. Did you know that Valmiki was a dacoit in his earlier days?



Thousands of years ago, a dacoit named Ratnaakar (also called 'Valya Koli) lived in the forests of north India. He earned his living by robbing and killing travelers who were passing through the forest. He would steal their belongings and food, and then take it home to feed his own children and wife.

One day, Sage Narada was passing through the forest. Suddenly, Valya came from behind a bush and threatened to kill Narada unless he gave up his belongings. Narada asked Valya as to why he lived this life of robbing and killing. "To feed my family," replied Valya. Narada asked him, "Don't you know it is a bad to kill and steal others? You will get bad Karma, and suffer punishment for it later. Will your family also share your bad Karma with you just like you share your loot with them?"

"Of course," said Valya. I will go and ask them and confirm it for you. But when Valya asked his wife and children if they will also share his bad Karma, they refused. They all said, "It is your duty to take care of us and feed us. This does not mean that we should also share your bad Karma with you." Now Valya was very sad, because the family whom he loved and for whom he did all the evil things was unwilling to share his bad deeds too. He realized that we all pay alone for our evil deeds, and earn good fruit alone for our good deeds. Valya then decided to mend his ways and become a good person.

So he rushed back to Sage Narada to tell him how sorry he was for all that he had done so far. “How can I atone for my bad deeds and become a good person?” Sage Narada asked him to sit in meditation, and continuously chant the name of Lord Rama till he returned. So Sage Valya sat at one place, and chanted ‘Rama-Rama’ without moving for thousands of years till termite ants made an ant-hill (called ‘Valmiki’) and complete covered his body. And therefore, he came to be known as Valmiki. Finally, a Divine voice from heaven said that God is pleased with the devotion of Valmiki and he can come out of the ant-hill. Sage Narada appeared and told Valmiki that now he was a reformed person.

In the course of time, Valmiki then became a Saint and a great poet. He wrote the Ramayana, the story of the beautiful character of Lord Rama. His first students were none other than Luv and Kush, the twin sons of Lord Rama himself. When the two princes sang the Ramayana in front of Lord Rama, he was greatly overjoyed. Rama confirmed that everything that is written in the Ramayana about his life is true.

The Ramayana written by him became famous all over the world. Even today, millions of people read the Ramayana and learn from the good virtues and deeds of Lord Rama so that they can themselves lead better lives.

The life of Sage Valmiki shows that even an evil person can become a saint if he starts worshipping God with full devotion and faith, and gives up bad deeds. If we want to give up bad habits, we should keep try rally hard and also ask God to help us. In the course of time, God will have mercy on us and he will change our minds so that we become virtuous.

__REASON 4:__ **We cannot even stick to our Dharma if we lack Fortitude and Commitment.** Many Hindus migrate from Hindu countries like India and Nepal to other places in search of a better livelihood. In their new environment, they encounter totally new cultures and religions. When we try to practice the Dharma that were born into, we frequently face hurdles. Sometimes the government laws prevent us from practicing our worship ceremonies (e.g., in Saudi Arabia, where Murtis are broken into pieces, and Mandirs cannot be constructed) and at other times, the local non-Hindu population itself opposes our customs. Hindus who are not dedicated and who lack courage then stop practicing their own Dharma, and convert to other religions. But Hindus who are brave, persevering and dedicated

towards our Dharma find out a way to remain Hindus. Here is an inspiring story of a man from the country of Trinidad and Tobago in South America.

Story: A Temple in the Ocean

More than 150 years ago, the British started taking people from India to work on sugar plantations on the island of Trinidad in the Atlantic Ocean. Most Indians were Hindus, but the British did not allow them to practice their Hindu Dharma.

One Hindu man named Shivadas Sadhu built a small Mandir of Shiva on a farm. But the government broke it, saying, "The land does not belong to you." Shivadas said, "The land might be yours, but the sea belongs to no one!" So every day after work, Shivdas started carrying stones and rocks in a leather bag on his bicycle. He started putting them on the coast of the sea, and slowly built a long path in the ocean. At the end of the path, he then constructed a small island. After many years of hard work, he finally constructed a Hindu Mandir on that island.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago recognized his dedication to Hindu Dharma, and declared the Mandir as a national monument. This means, that Trinidad recognizes the Mandir built by Shivadas as an important part of the culture of that country! Let us learn from Shivdas, and build Mandirs to Bhagavān and practice our Dharma wherever we go, even if the local government puts hurdles in our ways.

REASON 5: **We must have commitment and fortitude to even fulfill our promises.**

Story: The Sacrifice of Bhamati, the wife of Vachaspati Mishra

In ancient India, it was a Hindu tradition to give a gift (called 'Guru Dakshinā') to the teacher once the student had completed his education. In the 8th century, in the Indian state of Bihar, Vachaspati Mishra was one of the most brilliant students of his Guru. When his education was coming to an end, the Guru called for Vachaspati and requested, "I have only one daughter Bhāmatī. She is also a very learned woman. I would like you to be her husband. This is my command." Vachaspati replied, "That would be my honor. But I also want to give you a Guru Dakshinā per our tradition.

The Guru replied, "Very well then. I want you to write a detailed explanation of the Brahmasutras.[52] My daughter is very learned and she will help you too." Vachaspati and Bhāmatī got married, but he said to

[52] The Brahmasutras is a short work of around 550 short sentences which present the teachings of Upanishads about Bhagavān, the nature of this world and other spiritual matters in a systematic manner. The Upanishads are

her, "Till I do not complete this explanation of the Brahmasutras, we should not live like husband and wife. I must pay my Guru Dakshina first before I can accept you fully as my wife." Bhāmatī agreed.

Day and night, the two studied many different scriptures and he wrote beautiful explanations on all the schools of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. Finally, after mastering all these schools of philosophy, they couple started working on the explanation of the Brahmasutras, using as their basis the earlier work on the Brahmasutras by Shankaracharya. Many years passed, and Bhāmatī loving served her husband, and fulfilled all his needs even while helping with his scholarly work.

One late night, when the book was completed, Vachaspati fell asleep at his desk. When he woke up, he noticed that Bhāmatī had placed her own blanket on him, because it was a cold night. He looked at her carefully for the first time and saw that with time, she had become old and so had he. Their hair had turned white. Now, they were too old to have any children.

And yet, all these years, even though he never paid any attention to her services and to her sacrifice, she had never complained. She had smilingly chosen to help her husband in his work, even though that meant living several decades of your youth as a childless married lady. Vachaspati was very moved by her devotion to him and in his honor, he named his last work and greatest work on the Brahmasutras as 'Bhāmatī'. This beautiful work perpetuated the memory of her dedication, love and sacrifice for Vachaspati Mishra, and is even today considered one of the greatest classics of Hindu philosophy.

REASON 6: **Fortitude and Dedication are required to complete all great tasks.**

Story: How the Ganga River came to the Earth

The Ganga (also called 'Ganges') is the holiest river for the Hindus. Many sacred cities like Haridwar and Varanasi are located on its banks. Every year, millions of Hindus go to the Ganga for a dip in its waters, and pray to Bhagavān. Hindus also believe that a part of the Ganga river is present in other great rivers of India, like the Kaveri and Godavari. But Ganga did not always flow on this earth. Hindus believe that the waters of Ganga used to be present at the feet of Bhagavān Vishnu in the past. The story that we will read now tells us how Ganga came down to this earth, according to the Hindu scriptures.

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that part of the Vedas which focusses on these spiritual topics and explains how we can reach Bhagavān (called 'Brahman' in the Upanishads).

A great king named Sagar ruled the kingdom of Ayodhya several thousand years ago. He had two wives – Sumati and Keshinī. From them, he had 60,001 sons. Sagar decided to do an Ashvamedha Yajna. This was a grand ceremony after which he was to be crowned as the emperor of the whole world. But for one year before the ceremony, a white horse would be let loose on the earth. The horse would be free to go anywhere it wanted. If anyone captured that horse during that 1 year, he would have to fight the army of Sagar. If Sagar lost in this war, he could not become the emperor of the world. But if Sagar defeated everyone who had captured his horse, he would win and become emperor of the world.

When the horse started walking around, Sagar's sons started following it. Now, in heaven, Indra became worried. He was the king of all the devatās in heaven. But if Sagar became the King of the whole earth, he might then also start attacking heaven. Indra played a trick to defeat Sagar. He stole the horse, and hit it in a cave where Rishi Kapila was meditating.

The sons of Sagar reached the cave in search of that horse. They saw that the horse was standing next to Rishi Kapila, and they thought that he had stolen it. They got very angry at the Rishi and started to beat him. Rishi Kapila was a great saint and he got angry. He looked at the sons of Sagar and fire came out of his eyes. In a few minutes, all the sons of Sagar got burned and their bodies turned into ashes.

When the horse and his sons did not show up in Ayodhya for a long time, Sagar asked his grandson Amshumān to go and search for them. When Amshumān reached the cave, he saw the horse, and Rishi Kapila in meditation. Amshumān was a great devotee of Bhagavān Vishnu. He realized immediately that Rishi Kapila was an Avatāra of none other than Vishnu. He bowed to the Rishi, said a prayer to him and got His blessings. The Rishi was pleased with Amshumān. He told Amshumān of what had happened to his Uncles. He said, "Your uncles had did a great evil act by trying to harm me when I was meditating. The only way they can get rid of that sin is to bring Ganga waters to earth, and make them flow on the ashes of their burned bodies." Amshumān took the horse back to Sagar, where they completed the Ashvamedha Yajna. Sagar was now the emperor of the whole world.

After Sagar, Amshumān became the emperor. He remembered what Rishi Kapila had said about freeing his uncles from evil by bringing the waters of Ganga. So he meditated a lot and prayed to get the Ganga on the earth, but he failed. After Amshumān, his son Dilīpa became the emperor and he too tried to get the Ganga to the earth. But he failed as well. After Dilīpa, his son Bhagīratha became the next emperor.

Bhagīratha was very determined to free his ancestors from evil. He did not give up his meditation and worship. Finally, Ganga appeared in front of him and said, "I am willing to come down to the earth. But I have one worry. The force of my water falling from the

heaven will be so great that it will destroy the earth. Bhagīratha now prayed to Shiva.

Shiva was pleased with Bhagīratha and said , "Here is the plan – when Ganga descends from the abode of Vishnu to the earth, I will stand in the way. My long hair will capture the following waters. This way, they will not fall directly to the earth, and therefore the earth will not get destroyed by the river's force. The plan worked. Ganga fell from the skies on Shiva's hair. Bhagīratha walked away from Shiva towards the ashes of his ancestors. The river Ganga's waters followed Bhagīratha obediently till they flowed over the ashes.

With the touch of the water, the ashes got transformed into the bodies of the sons of Sagar. Then, they all arose and reached heaven. River Ganga also provided water to millions of farmers to grow crops, and water to humans and animals for drinking. Without the waters of Ganga, India cannot not survive and become a great country. Therefore, Hindus call the Ganga as 'Ma Ganga' which means 'Mother Ganges' because she nourishes us just like a mother nourishes her children. The river Ganga is also called Bhāgīrathī, because it was due to the efforts of Bhagīratha that she came down to the earth.

The story of Sagar, Amshumān, Dilīpa and Bhagīratha gives us a very important lesson. *Sometimes, it takes not just one but many people in many generations to complete a big task. Therefore, we should not lose patience if we do not succeed. Instead, many more people should join in the efforts to achieve the goal and complete the task for the good of everyone - even if it takes many generations of people to do so.*

DID YOU KNOW? Unlike water taken from other rivers, ponds or other water bodies, the water from Ganga does not become stale (i.e. germs do not grow in it) and does not stink even when it is kept in a bottle for several years!

41.5 When do we stop Trying?

In a war, the soldiers do not just keep charging to their death if defeat is certain. They withdraw, recoup and prepare for another day, when they can fight their enemy with a greater certainty of defeating him. In a similar way, a wise student does not give up too soon, and remains committed to completing his homework, sports practice and other stuff. But at the same time, he is mature enough to realize when his efforts are not bearing any fruit, and when he should get help, or return to his homework or activity at another time.

Taking a step back does not mean that we have given up and that we lack dedication or perseverance, it only means that we have made a practical choice to fight our problems when we are more equipped to deal with them. Of course, we must not give up just too soon, and without trying hard enough.

Discussion: What do you think of this statement – "A spider fell into a cup of milk and was not able to crawl out. He kept moving his legs till it had churned the milk so much that it had changed into solid yoghurt. Then the spider crawled out."?

42. Hard Work, Vigor and Energy

We should not be dull and lazy. We should show some energy and charisma and should always work hard and with enthusiasm. In English we say, 'God helps those who help themselves." The Vedas and other Hindu scriptures also have similar teachings-

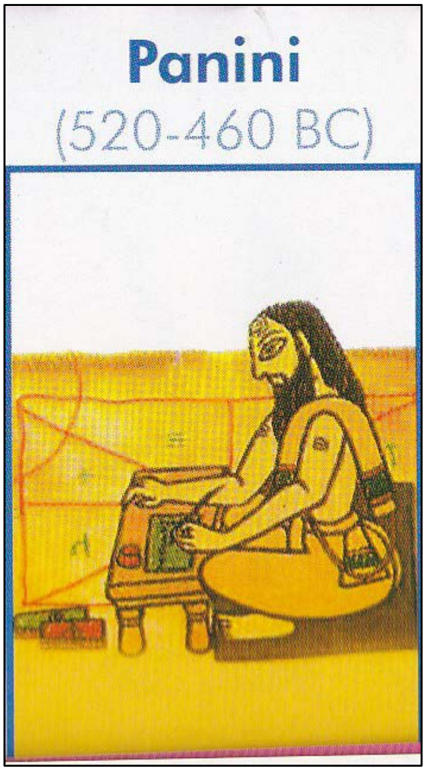
The Devatās desire him who offers worship and works hard. They do not like him who loves to sleep and is lazy. The hard working person gets great praise from them. **Atharvaveda 20.18.3**

Draupadi said – The man who is always sleeping, overcome with laziness, eventually gets poverty. Whereas a person who always engages in skillfully indeed obtains the desired fruit and becomes affluent. **Mahābhārata 3.32.42**

Sage Vyasa said to Yudhishthira – Laziness appears pleasing but ends in sorrow, whereas promptness and dexterity in acting appears painful but actually leads to happiness. Also, prosperity, wealth, decency and shame, forbearance and glory reside only in him who is active, not in him who is lazy. **Mahābhārata 12.27.31**

Stories on Hard Work

Below are three stories that illustrate the importance of hard work



Story: How Panini became a great Scholar

Once, Panini Muni went to a palmist for getting his hand read for determining his future. The Palmist said to him, "You are fated to be an illiterate fool because the line of education is missing from your palm."

Panini asked him, "Tell me where that line is." When the palmist answered his question, Panini took a knife and carved the line at that place on his palm. Panini then decided to give up his laziness, and worked hard to learn the grammar of the Sanskrit language.

After sometime, he wrote the book 'Ashtādhyāyī', that is considered one of the greatest works of Sanskrit grammar even today, 2500 years after Panini had lived.

Story: Yavakrita becomes a Scholar through Studying

Sage Bharadvaja and his son Yavakrīta were neighbors of Sage Raibhya and his sons. The latter were all great scholars. Many

people travelled long distances to study under Raibhya and his children. This made Yavakrīta jealous. But he did not like to study. So, he started praying to Lord Indra. Pleased with Yavakrīta's penance, Lord Indra appeared in front of him and offered him a boon. Yavakrīta asked that he become a great scholar, so that people should come to study under him, just as they went to study under Raibhya and his scholarly sons.

But Indra replied, "If you want to become knowledgeable, you should focus on your studies, rather than trying to please me and get the boon of wisdom from me."

But Yavakrīta would not listen. He resumed his austerities and penance, hoping that Indra would eventually get impressed and bless him with knowledge. One day, Yavakrīta went to the River Ganga to take a bath, when he noticed an old man throwing handfuls of sand into the river current. When Yavakrīta asked him the reason for doing so, the old man said, "People have a difficulty crossing the river. Therefore, I am constructing a bridge across it by throwing sand into the water."

Yavakrīta was amused, and said, "But you cannot construct a bridge this way because the water will keep washing away the sand that you throw. Instead, you need to work harder and put in more effort and materials to construct the bridge." The old man replied, "If you can become a scholar without studying, I too can construct a bridge with just handfuls of sand."

Yavakrīta realized that it was Lord Indra who came disguised as the old man to teach him that worship alone cannot result in scholarship. He therefore apologized to Lord Indra and started studying diligently. As a result of his hard work, Yavakrīta too became a great scholar in the course of time. This story also shows that we should work hard to study if we want to become knowledgeable. Prayer is not a substitute for hard work!

Story: Guru Nanak prefers the Roti of Hard-Working Lālo than the Delicacies of Bhāgo

Guru Nanak once visited the village of Saidpur (now called Eminabad, and in Pakistan). Everyone was eager to serve him.

It happened that Malik Bhago, a rich landlord of Kshatriya caste and an official of the local Pathan Nawab, was giving a feast. He had invited all religious and holy men to join in the feast. When he came to know that a saint was staying at the house of Lalo, Malik Bhago sent a servant to invite Guru Nanak to join in the feast. The Guru declined the invitation, but when Malik Bhago sent his man repeatedly requesting the Guru to come, the Guru finally went to his house.

Malik Bhago asked the Guru, "Why do you refuse my bread and eat at the house of a low-caste Hindu, though you are a holy man of high-caste?" The Guru replied, "I have no caste, for me all men are equal." "Then why did you decline to join my feast?" asked Malik Bhago. Answered the Guru, "Do you really want to know?" Bhago said, "Yes, I want to know why you preferred Lalo's simple bread to my food." The Guru asked Bhago to bring some of his food, and asked Lalo to do the same. When the food was brought by both, Guru Saheb took a piece from Lalo's food in one hand, and a piece from Bhago's food in the other. When he squeezed his hands, from Lalo's food oozed out drops of milk, and from Bhago's food, drops of blood.

The Guru said, "Now you see why I declined to join your feast; your food is blood stained because you have accumulated your wealth by exploiting the poor, while Lalo earns his bread by the sweat of his brow, and shares his earnings with the needy." Malik Bhago was much ashamed at this and became speechless. He fell at the Guru's feet and prayed for mercy. All the people gathered there, bowed in humility before the Guru.

The Guru looked at them with a loving glance and said, "That which belongs to another is unlawful, and as dirty as eating the flesh of the dead. A Guru showers his grace on those who refrain from eating the dead. The flesh of the dead does not become lawful by breathing God's Name over it. Nor do we attain salvation by merely reciting the holy verses."

Moral of the Story: A poor, honest and hard-working man’s food is worthy more than that of a rich man who is dishonest, miserly and who exploits others.

43. Non Hoarding and Simple Living (Aparigraha)

43.1 What is Aparigraha?

Aparigraha means that

- We should not hoard material goods like electronic games, clothing, cars, money etc.
- We should consume the minimum amount of resources to meet our needs, and do not become a victim of greed.
- We should live a simple life by keeping our possessions to a minimum.

Some people like to accumulate much more than what they can use. Their behavior is like that of squirrels, who bury piles of acorns and other nuts in the ground in autumn, thinking that they will eat them in sprint. But in the intervening winter, the squirrels forget all about their hoarded nuts, and never eat them in the next spring. Similarly some people just keep buying clothing, shoes and other goods even though they never even get a chance to use these things later on.

43.2 Harms of Hoarding

Parigraha or hoarding has many defects and harmful effects.

1. Economic Inequality: The earth has a limited amount of resources. Therefore, if we keep stockpiling goods (e.g. food-grains), they we are depriving others of the opportunity to use them, because we have removed these goods from the society.

2. Consumerism: Consumerism is an evil that is closely related to hoarding. In many modern societies like the American society, people consume a lot of goods – be it clothes, gasoline, food etc. For example, Americans are only 6% of the world's population, but they consume almost 30% of the energy resources (coal, gasoline etc.) in the world. Consumerism is therefore a major cause of environmental deterioration. When we consume more electricity, we burn more coal and this pollutes the environment to a greater extent. The Hindu philosophy of Aparigraha therefore asks us to make a distinction between what we really need and our greed. Truly speaking, we need just 1 or 2 homes to live, and therefore it is pure greed to buy a dozen homes in different cities, when you can only live in one of them at any given time.

3. Complicates Life: Hoarding also makes our life more complicated. We have to keep working hard so that we can earn more money with which we can hoard more and more things. Then, we have to spend even more money and time to keep them in a good condition. And finally when these things become non-usable, we need effort, time and money to clear out the clutter from our home! On the

other hand, if we keep only those things that we really need, we can be more relaxed and make our life and homes cleaner! As a contemporary spiritual leader says –

> "We too are like prisoners in the jail of this physical world. We spend all our time going after things that will not give us happiness. Whatever material gains we have in the world can lead us to more bondage if we are attached to them. For example, if we want a big house, we have to work longer hours to make enough money to pay for its mortgage. Then we need to fill it up with more and more furniture. That will take more time to pay for it, shop to buy it, and then to clean and repair everything. Before we know it, the house that was supposed to bring us pleasure has made us a slave to it. We no longer have time for our family, our children, or pursuits that will give us fulfillment. We spend all our time going after things that may not give us true and lasting happiness.
>
> Similarly, we may want to buy a computer to keep up with the latest technology. We then find ourselves working harder to buy all the right software and equipment to make it work. Soon we realize that we are not happy with a simple computer. We want to upgrade to a faster and more elaborate computer. Next, we find the computer that was supposed to save us time is taking up all our time. We end up spending hours learning to use the computer. We spend hours exploring the Internet. The e-mail system that was supposed to make communications faster is taking more and more of our time. Suddenly, we find fifty people e-mailing us daily and they expect an instantaneous response. If we do not respond right away they accuse us of being non-responsive and indifferent. Soon, we are spending hours on the computer. We have become slaves to our possessions."[53]

The truth is that we can never get permanent happiness by pursuing things that are themselves temporary. Electronic gadgets come out in upgraded versions every six months. How long can we keep running after them, and how many times can we upgrade them in our home?

4. Distortion of Reality: Hoarding also distorts our perspective of life. We start measuring our importance or that of others by the amount of goods that we possess. We also become attached to these material things as if they were living beings. But there is much, much more to life than clothing, shoes, games, cars etc. Instead of spending all of our time and attention on material things, we should use our energy in developing a relationship of friendship and love with our friends, family and with Bhagavān. (An easy example to understand is that of someone who prides himself for having 10,000 Facebook friends, but who does not have a single friend in his real life). Therefore hoarding is a hindrance in the path of developing good social relationships and in the path of our spiritual progress.

5. Reinforces Greed: Finally, hoarding is closely associated with greed. Many a time, we just do not have enough money to buy all the clothes that we want to hoard in our already over-flowing closets. So

[53] Rajinder Singh, pp. 46-47

we can get tempted to do shop-lifting, or steal money from others to satisfy our unreasonable cravings. Therefore, we should always keep a check on what we are buying, and whether we can afford to buy it.

43.3 How to Overcome Hoarding, and follow the Hindu Ideal of Aparigraha

1. Pratipaksha-Bhāvanā: Before buying or getting anything, think in your mind if you really need it.
2. Pratipaksha-Bhāvanā: Consider whether your acquiring of something is depriving others who need it more than you. Also, look into the environmental impact of your decision.
3. Try to avoid situations where you get tempted to get more than you really need, e.g. "all you can eat buffet," or "super-sale of clothes."
4. Datta: Get into the habit of gifting your belongings. You will find that there is greater joy in feeding a hungry person than in feeding yourself the food of two people!
5. Every month (or more frequently), make a list of things that you really need. Then, try to buy only those items that are on the list, avoiding purchase of thing that are not on the list.
6. Santosha: Cultivate the virtue of contentment. Seek happiness in little things, and be satisfies with whatever you can get with the money that you have earned with your hard labor. A single pair of shoes purchased with your own salary gives much more joy than 10 pairs of shoes gifted to you by a rich relative.
7. Develop the proper attitude towards money. Understand that not every happiness or object can be purchased with money. We cannot buy parents with money. We can buy a house, but not a home because a home is built with the love and respect of our family members. With money, we can construct a massive library, but we cannot develop good habits like reading.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the year 1931, Mahatma Gandhi visited London to talk to the British Govt., about granting freedom to India. A day before he was about to see King George VI, the British Emperor, a reporter advised him about his Gandhi's simple clothing, "You will be seeing the King. Don't you think you should be wearing something more substantial and decent?"

Mahatma Gandhi smiled and replied, "I think the King is wearing enough clothes for both of us!"

44. Contentment (Santosha)

44.1 What is Contentment?

Contentment means be happy with the few things that are obtained with one's own efforts, to be free of greed, to avoid accumulating goods and to not desire anything that belongs to others. We have already seen the harmful effects of hoarding and greed. Santosha is that mental quality which helps to fight greed, and also stops us from hoarding.

Most people think that they will be happy if they have 3 cars instead of 1, a mansion instead of a small home, a huge ward-robe instead of a modest collection of clothes and so on. But modern scientific research also shows that once our modest needs are met, then any additional gain in our income and possessions does not really increase our level of happiness. These scientific findings therefore confirm the following truths of the Hindu scriptures:

> The happiness obtained by him who is contended and who seeks joy within himself is many times more than the happiness of that person who, under the influence of desires and greed, runs in all the four directions and obtains a lot of wealth**. Bhāgavata Purāṇa 7.15.16**
>
> He who desires happiness should practice contentment and self-control because contentment indeed is the cause of happiness, and discontentment is the cause of unhappiness. **Manusmriti 4.12**

STORY: MORE PRECIOUS THAN THE DIAMOND:

One day, a villager approached a Sadhu and said to him – "Sir, Lord Shiva came to my dream last night. He told me that you will give me a stone that will wipe away my poverty. With that stone, I will become a very rich man."

The Sadhu said, "I do not have any stone to give to you. But if you insist, let me go through the only bag I have."

The Sadhu went through his bad, and found a huge colorless crystal – a giant diamond. The Sadhu gladly gave it to the villager and said, "May be, this is the stone that Bhagawan Shiva wanted to give to you. It is of no use to me. You can keep it. What will I do with a diamond."

The villager was astonished. He took the diamond and went home. He was very happy. But he could not sleep that night.

Next morning, he went to seek the Sadhu again, but he was not at that spot where he had met me the previous day. So he trekked into the jungle, and saw the Sadhu walking away towards the next jungle.

The villager ran up to the Sadhu and prostrated at the feet of the holy man.

"What do you want from me now," asked the Sadhu. The villager replied, "I want that wealth from you which makes you so rich that you do not mind giving away a diamond to me!"

The Sadhu replied, "That wealth is called contentment."

44.2 Contentment versus Ambition and Excellence:

Does contentment mean that we should not be ambitious, that we should not work hard to earn money, or that we should not aim to get into the best colleges and get the best jobs? The answer is 'no.' Any capable person should not waste his skills but instead he should use them for the benefit of himself as well as others.

In fact, Hindu scriptures ask us to try to be successful in our life – educationally, professionally and financially as is clear from the following scripture quotes:

> May I be the pinnacle of all of wealth. May I be the leader of all the equals. **Atharvaveda 16.3.1**
>
> He who has the strength and capability to do things but who did not act, that person has cut off his fingers and feet (so to speak). But he who has done good deeds for his sake and for the sake of others, that person indeed is like a blazing sun. **Atharvaveda 4.18.6**

But what Hindu Dharma teaches us that our aim for excellence should not be guided by greed or selfishness. Instead, we should use our success to do good to others. For example, if I get into the best medical college, then I should spend a big chunk of my skills for treating poor patients for free or at reduced medical charge. If I get a high paying job, I should use a considerable portion of my income to give away in charity, rather than buy a bigger mansion, or drive more expensive cars.

The Vedas put this ideal in a beautiful way-

> Gather with a hundred hands in a harmonious way, and distribute with a thousand hands. May your past as well as future actions become manifold (i.e. may your activities be successful and may they result in you doing greater and greater deeds in the future). **Atharvaveda 3.24.5**

45. Fickleness (or immaturity)

What is Fickleness?

Some people have a lack of self-confidence and are indecisive. They show immaturity in their behavior and do not think before doing their tasks. In addition to this fickleness of mind, they can also show physical fickleness by constantly moving their limbs while sitting, or talking meaninglessly all the time.

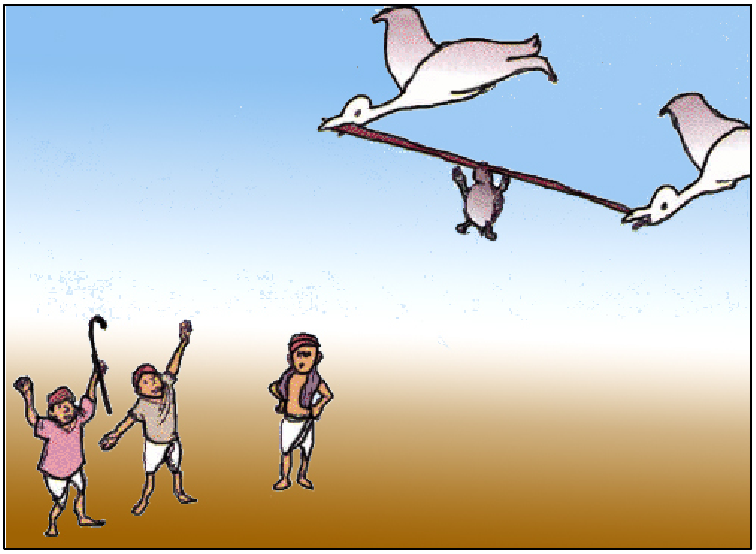
We should not keep talking all the time. We should speak only when we have too. We should remain quiet if we do not have to talk. If we talk too much, then people around us get very irritated. If we talk too much, then others think that we are foolish. Kids who are intelligent speak only when they have too. Most of the time, they keep quiet and listen to others, or do something to keep busy.

We should keep quiet even if someone is teasing us. The story below shows how a tortoise lost its life because it did not stay quiet when others teased it.

THE TORTOISE AND THE TWO SWANS: In a lake lived two swans and a tortoise. They were very good friends. One day, a fisherman came with his friends to the lake and said, "Tomorrow I will come with a big net and catch all the fish and the tortoise in this lake. When the tortoise heard this, he got scared and asked his friends, the two swan birds, to help him. There was another lake close by. The swans said that they will carry a stick in their mouths together and fly to that other lake. The tortoise can hold at the stick with its mouth.

When they reach the other lake, the tortoise can open his mouth and go into the water. But the swans said that the turtle should not open his mouth when they were flying together. Now, when they were flying from the old lake to the new one, some people saw the tortoise being carried in the air by the swans. They started teasing the tortoise saying, "Soon, your mouth will get tired. Then you will fall down from the stick and crash to the ground. We will come and pick up and eat you."

The tortoise was really stupid. He could not keep quiet. He opened his mouth and wanted to shout back at those people. But as soon as he had opened the mouth, he fell from the stick and fell to the ground below. As he hit the ground, he got crushed and was killed.



If only the tortoise had learned to keep quiet, his friend swans would have safely taken him alive to the new lake!

46. Cleanliness (Shaucha)

46.1 The Importance of Cleanliness:

We should be neat and clean. We should take a shower every day. We should wear clean clothes. We should eat clean food and our work should be neat. People who are dirty, untidy and filthy are also often very undisciplined and disorganized. These people cannot make much progress towards anything in their lives. The picture below shows good and bad habits with regard to cleanliness.

46.2 Internal and External Purity

Hindu scriptures state that, external cleanliness is not a substitute for internal purity. The latter is more important, but one must be pure both outside and inside.

Purification is of two types- external and internal. External purification is achieved through water and clay. Internal purification results from cleansing of one's inner thoughts (and emotions). **Vaadhuula Smriti 19 (also Daksha Smriti 5.3)**

External purity is preferable to impurity, and internal purity is superior to external purity. But he alone is pure who is pure both internally and externally. **Daksha Smriti 5.4**

Compassion, forbearance, freedom from envy, purity of body/mind and speech, absence of intemperate desires and ambitions, doing virtuous acts, not debasing oneself in front of others and not coveting sensual pleasures or possessions of others – these are the 8 qualities of the soul, that lead to one's union with Supreme Being. A man who has performed all the 40 Samskaras (sacraments) but does not have these 8 qualities does not reach Brahman, but he who has these 8 qualities of the soul and has performed only a few of these 40 Samskaras reaches Brahman. **Gautama Dharmasutra 8.24-26**

If a person is defiled in inner emotions, all his external actions never bear fruit even if he puts in his utmost effort. **Vāyu Purāṇa 2.8.182**

Even if a person donates all his possessions but with an impious inner soul, he shall not be considered virtuous. Piety is the true cause of perfection. **Vāyu Purāṇa 2.8.183**

Story: Internal Purity is Necessary:

"In a village there lived a young man called Podo or Padmalochan. There was an old, deserted temple in the village where no image of God was present. The place was infested with bats, covered with dust and overgrown with vegetation. One evening the villagers heard the sound of a conch shell being blown from the temple. They rushed to see if a deity had been installed in the temple. But instead they found Podo blowing a conch to make the confusion worse. One of the men shouted, "Unless you purify the place, the Lord will not take his seat in the temple. First work hard and clean the place. It is like purifying the senses. Then install Him in the temple of your heart. Otherwise making noise about your devotion makes the present confusion more chaotic."[54]

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46.3 When External Purity is Unavoidable

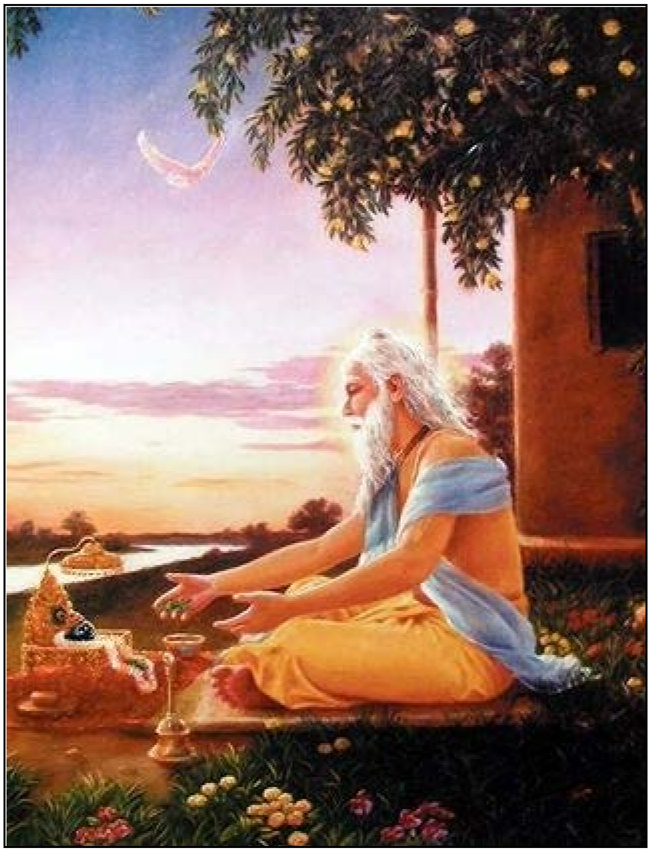
However, there are some instances where we have to indulge in unclean things, like eating unclean food. The story below gives an illustration of this type of situation from the Mahabharata.

Story: Sage Vishwamitra eats a Dog

Once upon a time, there was a great famine in northern India. Sage Vishwamitra roamed far and wide in search of food, but did not find anything to eat. He was on the verge of starvation. He happened to walk by a hut in which lived a chandala. A chandala was a person in ancient India who lived in a very filthy manner, and was not at all cultured or educated. In the hut was also a half-eaten carcass of a dog. Apparently, the front half of the carcass had been eaten by the chandala and only the blood soaked putrid rear half remained there.

Sage Vishwamitra asked the Chandala if he could eat that carcass. The Chandala was shocked! He asked – "You are a great Sage. You know what is right and what is wrong. So how can you ask me for this carcass as food? First, I am a chandala, and you should not be eating in the house of a dirty and uncultured person like me. Secondly, cultured people like you do not eat dog's meat, and certainly not the hind legs of a dog. Have you forgotten what is good and what is bad?"

Sage Vishwamitra replied – "I do know what is good and what is bad. But, if I do not eat, I will die. If I am dead, I cannot do any good deeds. Therefore, I believe that it is very important to stay alive, and be healthy. Only a person who is alive can do good deeds and practice Dharma. A dead man cannot do anything."



The chandala saw that what Sage Vishwamitra said made sense. So he gratefully offered the carcass to the Sage for eating. Before eating, the Sage sat in meditation, and prayed to God to ask for forgiveness. He promised to God that once he had regained his strength after eating the carcass, he would atone for his sins. But Lo! A great miracle occurred. God caused a sudden downpour of rain. And even more miraculous, the water of the rain caused plants to grow instantaneously. As a result, the Sage did not have to eat the carcass anymore.
Source: Mahabharata, Shanti Parva

Moral of the Story: If one is starving, there is no sin in eating unclean and bad food to save one's life. One must try to preserve one's body so that he can do good karma. When times improve, we should ask for God's forgiveness for having eating impure food, and atone for it by doing even more good karma.

Practical Applications: List 2 situations in which it would be OK to eat filthy food:

1. ____

2. ____

Story: Use Unclean Items only if you do not have a Choice

Sage Ushasti Accepts Left Over Food but Refuses Left Over Water

Sage Ushasti lived with his wife in a village in the Kuru country in Northern India. One year, the crop was devastated by a hailstorm. There was very little food to eat for people. Ushasti had no food one night, and he went around begging.

He found an elephant owner who had just finished eating some beans and was about to throw the leftovers into garbage. Sage Ushasti requested for the leftover food. The kind elephant owner gave him the leftover beans in the plate. Ushasti ate some, and kept the rest for his wife. When he was about to leave, the elephant owner asked him if he'd like to get some water as well. The water was in a jug from which the elephant owner had drunk by touching it to his lips. But the sage refused, saying that he did not want that water because it was unclear.

The elephant owner was surprised and he said – "Respected Sage! You had no problem eating the food that I had half eaten but are refusing the water just because I have drunk from the same jug!"

Sage Ushasti replied – "I took your food because there was none else available to me. Had I not eaten the beans, I would have fainted out of weakness. But as far as the water is concerned, I can get clean water from the river. I do not have to drink the unclean water and therefore did not take up on your offer for the same."

Source: Chhāndogya Upanishad, chapter I section 10

Moral of the Story:

1. We should try to eat clean food at all times, but it may be necessary to accept unclean food when there is nothing else to eat. Nevertheless, even during a calamity, we should only take as much food as we need. A calamity should not be used as an excuse to hoard stuff that we do have with us.
2. We should take only what we need, not more.

Practical Applications: List two ways in which you can possibly practice this teaching from Sage Ushasti's life in your own everyday life.

1. ____

2. ____

47. Purity of Intellect:

47.1 Internal Purity versus External Cleanliness:

Purity of Intellect means that that we should keep the mind pure, and free of evil thoughts and behaviors.

The relationship and relative importance of inner and outer cleanliness can be understood with an example. Consider a clear glass filled with water. If the glass is dirty from outside and clean from inside, it looks dirty to you but you can still drink water from it. But if a glass is dirty from inside and clean from outside, not only does it look dirty, but you cannot even drink the water from it. And of course, if the glass is dirty from both inside and outside, you will not even touch it.

Similarly, if our mind inside is unclean, it starts showing in our external behavior and no one will feel safe to come into contact with us. But if our mind is clean, then even if we wear shabby clothes, some people will look beyond our shabby appearance and would like to interact with us due to our good inner nature.

So the conclusion is that it is best to be clean from both inside and outside, but inner purity and cleanliness is definitely more important than outer purity and cleanliness.

> "They who are pure at heart are pure even if impure externally. And they whose hearts are impure are impure even if they be clean from outside." **Nītidvishashtikā of Sundara Pāndya, verse 44**

47.2 How can we keep our Intellect Pure?

There are many ways to keep our intellect pure.

- We should eat pure food. Eating food that is clean, not to spicy or salty, not too oily, not too dry, is healthy and wholesome is beneficial not just for our body but also for the mind.
- We should associate with good people. We should avoid the company of bad people because they will have a bad influence on our minds.
- We should cultivate good habits. We should give up bad habits.
- We should keep busy with useful work. An empty mind is devil's workshop.
- We should read good books and avoid bad books.
- If possible, avoid seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and speaking bad things.
- Worship God and meditate.

Story on Purity of Mind: Saint Ravidas and the Golden Bangle

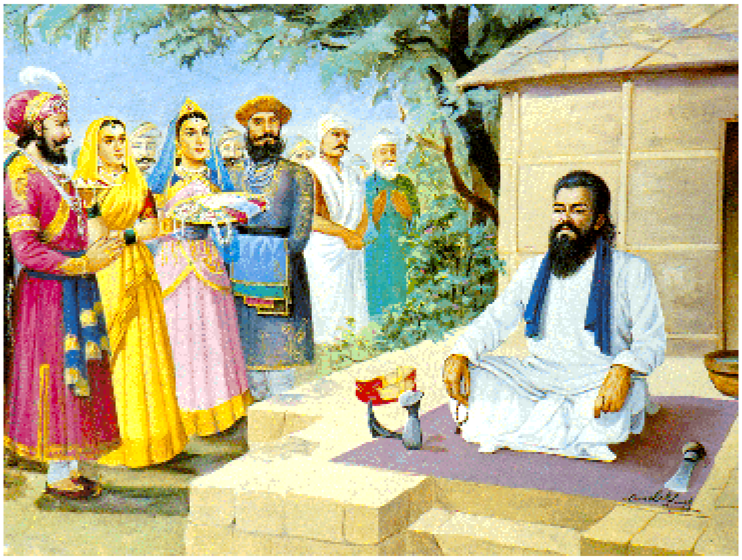
In Varanasi lived a humble cobbler named Ravidas, who used to make his living by repairing the leather shoes of his customers. In those days, cobblers were looked down upon as unclean by others because they handled leather which came from the hides of dead animals. However, Ravidas did his work diligently, and constantly remembered God and sang his praises in his heart while working.

One day, a Brahmana knowledgeable in all Hindu scriptures came to Ravidas to get his shoe repaired. Out of humility and respect for the scholarly Brahmana, Ravidas refused to take any money from him for repairing the shoe but asked him for a favor. Ravidas had saved a small copper coin from his heard earned money, and he requested the Brahmana to offer it to Mother Ganga when he went to Haridwar, another holy city on the River Ganga. But Ravidas insisted – "Do not just throw my coin into the river. First say to Mother Ganga that Ravidas has sent this gift for you. If only she stretches out her hand, place the coin on it. Otherwise, do not offer it to Mother Ganga."

The Brahmana was amused and thought that Ravidas was a fool to think that a hand would stretch out of the river Ganga to accept his coin. Nevertheless, when he went to Haridwar, he did do what Ravidas had requested. Suddenly, a hand stretched out of the River to take the coin and said – "I am glad to accept my son Ravidas' gift to me." The Brahmana was shocked, but the hand came out again - this time holding a beautiful golden bangle. River Ganga then spoke in a human voice – "I am sending this gift for my beloved son Ravidas. When you travel to Varanasi, please give this bangle as a gift to him on my behalf."

The Brahmana became greedy upon getting the bangle. He thought – "Who will believe that River Ganga gifted a precious bangle to a poor and ignorant cobbler Ravidas? I will gift this beautiful bangle to the King, and he will give me a lot of money in return."

The Brahmana took the bangle to the King who gifted it to the Queen. But the Queen wanted an identical bangle for her other wrist too. The King now warned the Brahmana – "Go and get me another identical bangle, or I will get you imprisoned."



The poor Brahmana did not know what to do. So he took the bangle to Ravidas in Varanasi and narrated the whole story. Ravidas did not feel angry with the Brahmana at all. Instead, he said – "I am so happy that my mother Ganga sent me a gift." Then he brought a bowl of water in which he used to dip pieces of leather (to make them soft) that he used for repairing shoes, and said – "If my mind is pure, may Mother Ganga appear in this bowl." (*'jab man changaa to katori mein ganga'*).

A miracle happened – the Brahmana saw the River Ganga flowing inside the bowl, and he also saw several similar bangles in the bed of the river. Saint Ravidas then pulled out a bangle and gave it to the Brahmana, asking him to give the 2 bangles to the King.

The Brahmana was greatly humbled. He realized that all his mastery over scriptures was worth nothing in front of the humility, purity of mind, simplicity and devotion of Ravidas- a mere cobbler. He went to the King and narrated the whole story to him. The King was amazed and the entire royal family turned up to honor Ravidas. Everyone used to think that Ravidas was dirty because he was a cobbler who

worked with an unclean material like leather. But so pure was the mind of Ravidas, that River Ganga (which itself is said to purify us when we take a dip in it) considered Ravidas as Her own son.

Today, the birthday of Sant Ravidas is a Federal holiday in India and 16 of his compositions have been included in Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of Sikhs.

Story: Sant Shankardev of Assam and the Pure Fisherwoman Rādhikā:

The Tembuwani river in Assam is a tributary of the mighty Brahmaputra. In the rainy season, the Brahmaputra caused a great backflow of water into the Tembuwani river. As a result, the people living on the banks of the Tembuwani river had to suffer a lot. The swollen river washed away their homes, crops and the soil in the fields.

The villages approached Shankaradeva and sought his help. The saint decreed that if a chaste woman were to pour some water into the stream with a vessel that had holes all over it, the river would subside permanently. The wives of Brahmanas, Kayasthas and all other upper caste men were approached with a request to do so, but they obviously declined. “How could water stay in a vessel with holes in it,” they said?

The villagers went in a large group to Shankaradeva to convey the bad news that no high born lady was willing to take up the challenge. At the same time, a fisherman named Purnanda and his wife Radhika were going down the Tembuwani river on a boat. Seeing the crowd, they too approached the saint. When Radhika heard the cause of the meeting, she promptly ordered to help out. Everyone including her husband was aghast at her audacity. How could a humble fisherwoman do what the high born ladies could not? But Shankaradeva intervened and asked the fisherwoman to observe a fast in honor of God and come to the site the following day, carrying water in the perforated vessel.

The next day, the lady did as she was told. Everyone was stunned to see that the humble but pious fisherwoman, with the blessings of the saint and God was able to carry water in the perforated container without losing it. As soon as she poured it into the Tembuwani river, the waters of the river immediately came to a standstill. This miracle allowed the villagers to construct a dam to divert its flow and prevent flooding in future.

Through this miracle, Radhika and Shankaradeva showed that being born in a high caste does not make one superior, and members of the so called low caste can also be more pious and accomplished than the former. Fishing was considered an unclean profession in India at that time, and fishermen and fisherwomen were therefore considered dirty person. But Sant Shankaradeva recognized the fact that it was the purity of Radhika’s mind that made her suitable for doing a task that no one else could have done.

48. Self Respect & Absence of too much Pride

48.1 Self Respect versus Pride

Pride is an evil, and humility is a virtue. But this does not mean that we are so humble that we allow everyone to insult us and run over us. In the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavān Krishna says that we should not have 'atimānitā' or 'excessive pride.' It is significant to note that Shri Krishna does not ask us to give up all our pride or sense of self-worth. He is merely asking us to avoid "too much" pride or avoid thinking that we are very important. One must distinguish between self-respect and a sense of self-worth on one hand, and egocentrism and arrogance on the other. Self-respect is a good thing for a worldly person or a householder to have, arrogance and pride are not. For this reason, Hindu scriptures say-

Draupadi said to Yudhishthira – No one should degrade himself because he who thinks himself as weak or small will never get any power or glory. **Mahābhārata 3.32.48**

Bheeshma said – Do not go anywhere without an invitation, but a Vedic Yajna may be attended as an onlooker even if not invited. You lose your lifespan and well-being by going to a place where you are not respected. **Mahābhārata 13.104.142**

48.2 The Complexities of Self-Respect, Pride, Humility and Respect for Others

In the Purānas, we read the story of the marriage of Sati with Shiva. Her father Daksha hated Shiva and considered him an uncouth person unworthy of respect. Once, Shiva attended a Yajna organized by Daksha. But when Daksha arrived, he insulted Shiva. But Shiva did not respond because he did not want to hurt his wife by talking back to her father. He just got up and left (showing his self-respect). Sometime later, his wife came to another Yajna, in which Daksha insulted her husband in front of everyone and in His absence.

Sati did not mind getting insulted herself, but she could not bear the insult to her husband, and therefore committed suicide. When the word reached Shiva, He was deeply angered at Daksha for causing her to die, and he invaded the Yajna and his assistants destroyed everything.

This narrative illustrates the complexity of respect for others, pride, self-respect and humility. Shiva did not retaliate when his father in law insulted him in the first Yajna, out of humility and out of respect for him. His wife too bore insults to herself, but she did not bear insults against her husband. And the same Shiva, who had been very forgiving, could not forgive what Daksha had done to His wife, and therefore he invaded his Yajna and beheaded him.

The message of the story is that whenever we consider our own self-respect and pride, we must also take into consideration what our behavior might have on our loved ones. Sometimes, we may have to forgo our self-respect so that our own loved ones are not hurt.

Story on Self Respect: Lord Krishna Rejects a Royal Feast

The Kauravas deprived their cousins Pandavas of their kingdom by unfair means. The Kauravas had promised that they would return the kingdom to the Pandavas after 13 years. But when the Pandavas asked for their kingdom back after waiting for that period, the Kauravas refused to return it. It appeared that a war would break out between the Pandavas and the Kauravas now. To maintain peace, Lord Krishna decided to go and talk to the Kauravas in their capital Hastinapur. The Pandavas said that they would accept whatever Lord Krishna is able to get from the Kauravas.

When the Kauravas heard that Krishna is coming to Hastinapur, they sent a message to Him requesting Him to stay in their palace. They also invited Him to eat his lunch and dinner cooked in their royal kitchen. The Kauravas thought that since they are powerful and rich, Krishna might get impressed by their royalty and power. He might then agree to a deal that benefits only the Kauravas and does not get the Pandavas anything. But Lord Krishna told the Kauravas – "We should eat food at someone else's place only when we are in trouble or when they call us with love or respect. I am not in trouble, and you do not love me or respect me. So I cannot come."

When Krishna arrived at Hastinapur, He first went to see his aunt and mother of Pandavas, Queen Kunti who loved and respected Krishna a lot. Then He went to greet King Dhritarashtra and inform him of His arrival. Then, He went to the home of Vidura, the step Uncle of both the Kauravas and Pandavas. Vidura was the son of a maidservant and lived humbly and ate very simple food comprised of fruit and vegetables. But he was famous for being very wise and knowledgeable, and for being very fair and honest. Lord Krishna requested Vidura for food and ate whatever simple food comprising of vegetables that he was offered.

This beautiful incident from the Hindu scripture Mahabharata shows that we should not just visit and enjoy the hospitality of people who are strong, powerful and rich but who have no love or respect for us. A lot of times, we accept their invitation for the fear of annoying them and thinking that we will get some benefit out of them. But behaving in this manner is wrong. Instead, we should serve and pay attention to people who are truthful, knowledgeable and honest, or who love us and respect us – even if they are old, poor and humble.

49. Modesty (Decency) and Shame (Hri)

49.1 What is Hri (Shame)

The word Hri in Sanskrit means the following things-

1. To behave modestly (as in not wearing flashy or skimpy clothes; or attracting too much attention to oneself by talking or laughing loudly etc.)
2. Hesitation in doing wrong things.
3. A sense of shame or guilt when we do a bad thing.

Some people lack a conscience and have no sense of shame in doing evil things. There is no hope for these people because they will continue to do their evil acts brazenly and will never improve. Therefore our scriptures say:

> Sage Vyasa said – "He whose heart is always saturated with evil tendencies, and who does not feel remorseful after committing an evil act – that person gets tainted by evil in all respects, so say the scriptures. There is no way that person can atone for his evil, and no atonement can lessen the taint of his evil deeds." **Mahābhārata12.33.35-36**

49.2 How do we Overcome our Guilt & Make Up for Our Mistakes?

No one is perfect, and we all commit mistakes. But it is not sufficient to wallow in guilty after coming an error. Hindu scriptures give considerable guidance on how we should make up for our mistakes, and the following is a summary of their teachings:

1. **No Cover Up:** First, do not try to cover up your mistake and try too much too hide it. In our attempt to hide our error, we may land up doing more mistakes and evil actions. To cover one lie, we often have to speak a dozen more!
2. **Admission**: Second, admit your guilt to the victim of your action and apologize to him.
3. **Prayer:** Ask Bhagavān for forgiveness with a genuine humility and sense of remorse.
4. **Confession:** Sometimes, it is not possible to admit guilt in front of the victim. In that case, we should confess in front of a trusted person. We should be careful that we do not confess to any convenient or to any unscrupulous person. Instead, the confession should be made to a person who is virtuous and is of a saintly disposition. Confessing does not mean that we should go about announcing our faults to everyone. If we do so, evil minded people will take advantage of us. Therefore, the Mahabharata advises:

> Bheeshma said – Therefore, do not conceal your evil acts, because evil grows in magnitude when it is concealed. Instead, if you have done something wrong, confess it to saintly persons and they will pacify its harmful results. **Mahābhārata 13.162.58**

5. **Repentance and Resolve:** At the heart of making up for our mistakes is a strong feeling of remorse and a resolve that we will not repeat our mistake. This is a must in making up for one's mistake.
6. **Compensation:** For the harm caused to the victim of our mistake, we should compensate them.
7. **Atonement:** If compensation is not possible, the effect of the bad Karma sticks to the doer, and it must be atoned. Hindu scriptures contain lengthy prescriptions of how we can atone for our evil actions.

49.3 Historical Examples of Atonement

Hindu tradition records many instances of how our saints and great Kings atoned for their unacceptable actions. In the 1001 CE, the Hindu Shahi ruler Jayapal of eastern Afghanistan and NW Pakistan lost a battle to Sultan Subuktigin. He signed a humiliating treaty to save his life, but his subjects refused to accept him their king anymore, saying that they had disgraced his kingdom by his cowardice. In repentance, King Jayapal committed suicide by immolating himself.

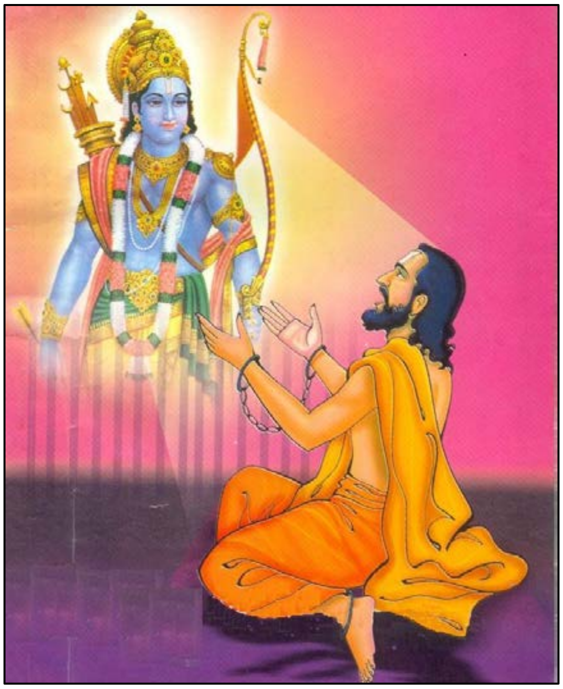
Kumarila Bhatta, a great Vedic scholar in the early 8th cent. CE was pained to see that Buddhism was rapidly spreading across India. In order to refute Buddhism and re-establish the Vedic religion, he disguised himself as a Buddhist and studied the religion of the Buddha under a Buddhist Guru. Having mastered Buddhism, he then revealed his true intentions, and started engaging Buddhist scholars in philosophical debates, defeating them one after the other. But a sense of guilt for having cheated his Guru always lingered in the mind of Kumarila, and in his later days, he decided to atone for his sins by self-immolation.

The Solanki ruler Mulraj ascended his throne in the 10th cent. CE after killing several of his relatives in a war of succession once his father had died. He was filled with great remorse, and as an atonement, he constructed the famous Rudramahalaya complex of Shiva temples in Siddhapur in Gujarat.

Hindus however do not take recourse to these extreme forms of atonements. Our scriptures prescribe easier ways – like pilgrimages, giving charity, performing worship etc., in addition to some of the above steps as atonements for our evil Karma. Let us now read the inspiring story of Saint Bhadrachalam Ramadas and see how he atoned for his actions.

Story: Bhadrachalam Ramadas' Repentance brings Darshana of Rama to a Muslim Ruler

In the 16th cent. CE, Abdul Hasan Tanashah, the ruler of the Golconda kingdom (corresponding to modern state of Andhra Pradesh in India) imposed the Jaziya tax on Hindus to persuade them to convert to Islam. In the district of Bhadrachalam, his tax collector was ironically a Brahmana named Gopanna, who was a great devotee of Rama. Gopanna dutifully served his master, taxing his fellow Hindus. He became rich, but he spent most of his income in feeding poor devotees of Rama.



One night, Bhagavān Rama asked him to construct a new temple for Him in Bhadrachalam so that His devotees could worship Him fearlessly. Construction of a grand Hindu temple in a Muslim kingdom was unthinkable, but nevertheless, Gopanna started going around to collect funds for the Mandir. Everyone refused to give him any money with various excuses, till an old man told him, "Aren't you ashamed to ask for money for a Rama Mandir? You are the one who has been serving as a lackey to Tanashah, who is fleecing us poor Hindus by forcing us to pay the Jaziyah tax. And it is you who has been collecting the tax for him. You have betrayed your own people for your own fame, and now you dare to ask us for money for a Hindu Mandir?"

The retort for the old man really stung his heart, and Gopanna came up with an idea. He started stealing some money from his tax collections. In a few years, he had collected enough money with which he had a grand Rama Mandir constructed in Bhadrachalam.

When the word reached Tanashah, he was furious. He ordered Bhadrachalam to be imprisoned in the dungeons of the Golconda fort jail until he paid the money that he had stolen from the royal tax collection. For 12 long years, Gopanna languished in the jail, and the devotees of Rama named him 'Bhadrachalam Ramadasa', or the servant of Rama from Bhadrachalam.

Facing tortures in the jail, Gopanna did not lose his faith in Rama. With his finger-nails, he painfully scratched a picture of Bhagavan Rama for his worship, and composed beautiful hymns to his Deity. One day, he suddenly heard Tanashah come into the prison and fall at his feet, saying, "Please forgive me Gopanna. I am releasing you immediately."

Gopanna was shocked, and asked how the king's heart had changed after these 12 long years? What Tanashah told him was even more shocking, "Yesterday night, two regal looking princes visited me in my room. They were luminous and their majesty was overwhelming. Indeed, they were Rama and Lakshmana, because they carried bows in their arms, and looked Divine. They paid me the money that you had taken from my tax collection, and asked me to release you. I was so over-powered by their beauty and power, that I have become their devotee. Now I truly believe that you did construct the Mandir for your God, and that he has Himself come to ask me to release you."

When Gopanna heard these words, he immediately forgave Tanashah saying that he was blessed that Bhagavān Rama had himself appeared in front of him. In repentance, Tanashah now commanded that

the kingdom of Golconda will offer pearls to the Mandir every year, and the gold coins left by the Princes with the King will be treated as sacred objects.

And so, the tradition of gifting pearls and of worshipping the gold coins was started, and it still continues to this day, carried out by the State Govt. of Andhra Pradesh. The nail drawing of Gopanna can still be seen inside the jail of Golconda, and is worshipped by devotees even today. Clearly, Gopanna had realized that he had committed an evil action by colluding with Tanashah to fleece his fellow Hindus, but Rama had accepted his atonement and repentance!

BHADRACHALAM RAMA TEMPLE

50. Environmental Awareness

50.1 Hindu Dharma and Environmental Awareness

In other religions, the environment consisting of animals, plants and natural resources is considered the wealth of humanity, meant for use as we please. However, Hindu Dharma treats all living creatures as our family members, with whom we share our Mother Earth. In fact, even non-living objects like stones and rivers are pervaded by Paramatman, or God as the Supreme Soul. Therefore, Hindu tradition forbids us from wanton abuse and destruction of our environment through slaughter of animals, cutting down or trees or defiling the earth by indiscriminate mining and other similar activities.

Manu Smriti 8.285 asks the state to impose fines for unnecessary damage or destruction of trees. Even when trees are cut for specific purposes, prayers of forgiveness should be offered, according to Manu Smriti 11.143. Planting of trees is said to be very good Karma, and it brings great rewards. In fact, Queen Kunti says in the Mahabharata that the trees are our true companions and even if life were possible without trees, it would not be worth living.

Likewise, for animals, Manusmriti prescribes fines and punishments if pedestrians and cart drivers injure animals intentionally. There are even rules for the minimum number of oxen that should be tied to the plough so that they are not over-worked, and rules concerning riding of horses, feeding domestic animals before the owner eats himself and so on.

Intentional pollution of water bodies, soil etc., are also all recognized as punishable offences in the Hindu tradition. The Hindu belief that Paramatman resides in the entire creation, and that animals and plants also have souls (whereas Christians and Muslims do not always accept that they have souls), and the Hindu values of vegetarianism, aparigraha (non-hoarding), austerity and santosha (contentment) are very conducive towards environmental awareness and conservation.

50.2 The Special Role of Hindu Americans

The United States of America has approximately 6% of the world’s area and about 5% of the global population, but our country consumes 30% of world’s overall energy. The heavy demand for meat (especially beef) in our country is causing ranchers in South America to cut forests and raise beef cattle. And studies show that almost 15% of the food put on our tables is actually wasted and garbaged! Quite clearly, we Americans are consuming a lot of global resources and are disproportionately taxing our environment. Therefore, it is our Dharma to promote the Hindu principles of environmental consciousness in our society.

We cannot shy away from our responsibility by saying, “What can I as a little person do?” We may not have influence over many people, but let us try to light our own little dark corner. At the same time, let us not underestimate ourselves, because as a Sanskrit proverb goes, “The lamp lightens the room where the sunshine cannot reach.” We can conserve vegetation, water and electricity in our day to day habits as show in the next three pages.

50.3 Conserving Vegetation

Good Habits

He plants trees in his yard.

He tells his friends about the importance of plants and trees.

He takes care of his plants and waters them regularly.

He offers the flowers from his plants to Bhagwan during his morning *puja*.

Bad Habits

He harms trees and plants by unnecessarily cutting off their branches and leaves.

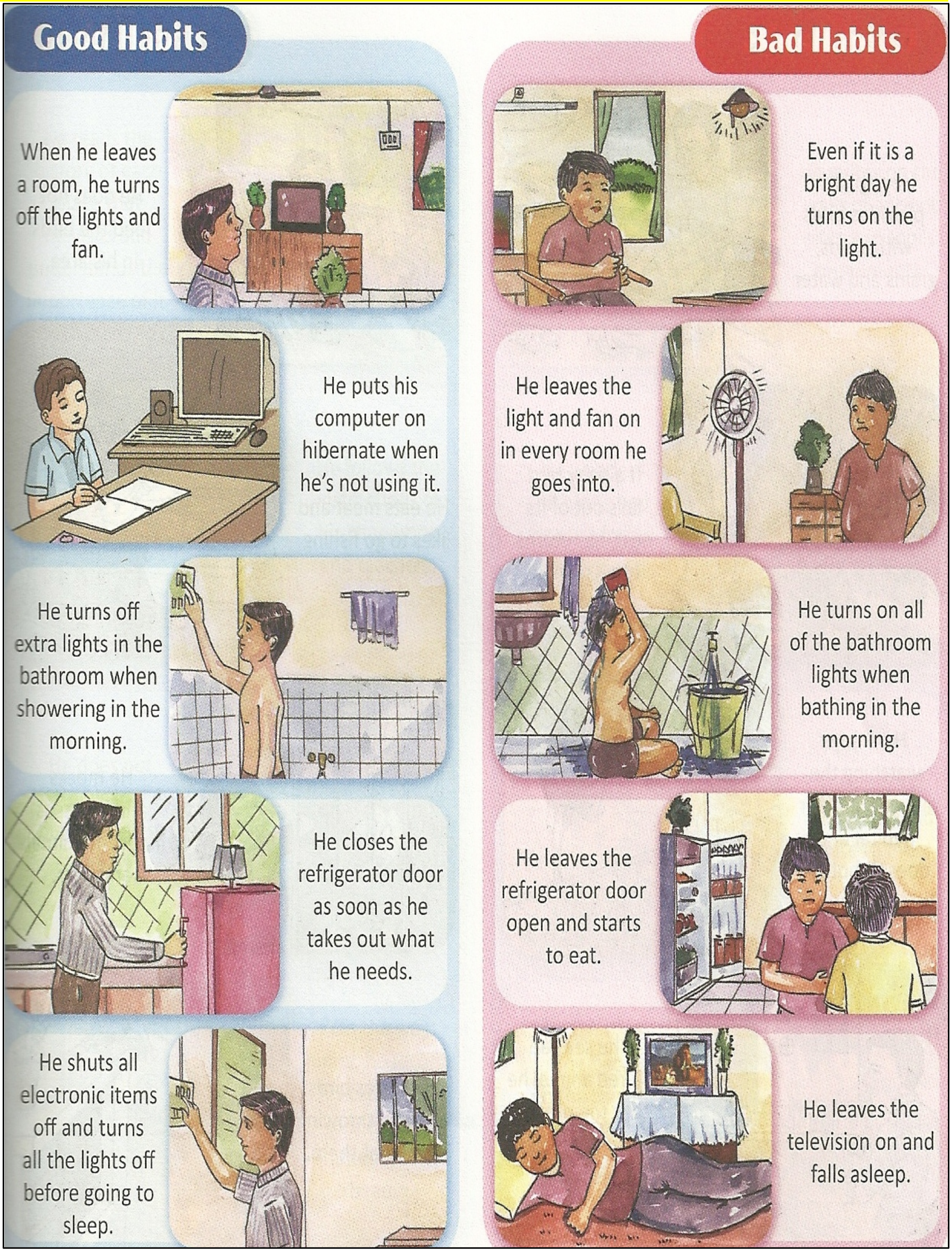
He destroys plants and shrubs by riding his bicycle over them.

He never takes care of the plants in his yard and they end up dying.

He plucks unripe fruits and destroys beautiful flowers.

50.4 Conserving Water

50.5 Conserving Electricity



PART V

SPIRITUAL IDEALS OF HINDUS

51. Performance of Worship

51.1 How do we Hindus worship Bhagavān?

There are four major ways in which we can do worship of Bhagavan.

1. Japa
2. Puja
3. Yoga
4. Yajna

51.2 What is Japa?

Bhagavan has thousands of beautiful names. Every name of Bhagavan has a beautiful meaning. Some Hindus like to repeat names of Bhagavan with a lot of **bhakti** (love) because it makes them feel closer to Bhagavan. Many other Hindus like to repeat the **Gayatri Mantra** or some other prayer many times.

Repeating the names of Bhagavan or repeating a **mantra** many times is called '**Japa**'. Some birds like the parrot can also repeat words that it hears from humans. But if a parrot says 'Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama,' will you say that the parrot is doing a **'japa'**? No, because the parrot does not understand the meaning of the name Rama. Does the parrot have any **bhakti** towards Bhagavan? We do not know, because the parrot cannot speak to us and we cannot speak to a parrot.

This means, that whenever we do a **Japa**, we should understand the meaning of what we are saying. Also, we should do the **japa** with a lot of **bhakti**.

It can become very difficult to know how many times you have chanted the name. To help you count the number of times that we have chanted the name or the **Mantra**, we can use a **Japa-Maalaa**.

The **Japa-Maala** is a string of 108 beads. The 108th bead of the **Japa-Maalaa** is different

from the other beads. We hold the **Japa-Maalaa** with the help of our thumb, and our first finger (we can use other fingers too). Then, we start the **Japa**. Every time we chant once, we rotate the **Japa-Maalaa** by one bead. When you have chanted 108 times and reach the 108th bead, your finger will come to know that it is touching the bead which is different from others.

Then, you turn around the string and start chanting again 108 times till you reach the 108th bead. Below are some pictures of a **Japa-Maalaa**.

51.3 What is Pūjā

In **Puja**, we sit in front of a **murti** of Bhagavan in our home or in a **mandir**. Then, we respectfully offer flowers, water, and fruit and cooked food to the **murti**. Then we do a **Namaste** to the **murti**, and do a **Japa** of some **mantras**. We end the **puja** with an **Arati**. We wave a plate with a lamp around the Murti, ring bells and sing mantras. The picture on the left shows a woman doing an arati to a murti of Bhagavan Ganesha in her puja.

If we need help from Bhagavan, we speak to the **murti**. Sometimes, some people are very sad. They can even cry in front of the **murti** during the **puja** because Bhagavan will listen to us. But if we are not sad, we should do the **puja** with a smile on our face.

Before we do the **puja**, we should take a shower and wear clean clothes. We should not go with a dirty body and clothes in front of the **murti**. We should make sure that the place is quiet. If there is loud music in that room, we should switch off the music player.

When we are doing the **puja**, we should just think of Bhagavan. Do not think about your friends, toys or food. We should try to do **puja** with our family - with our parents, sisters, brothers, children, grandparents. But if they are not present, or if we want to talk to Bhagavan in secret, we can do it alone also. The picture on the right shows a family doing a puja.

51.4 What is Yoga?

In **Yoga**, we close our eyes and think only about Bhagavan in our mind and in our heart. When we do **Yoga**, we should sit in a quiet place which is not too cold, and not too hot. We should not think of toys, friends, school, pets or anything else. We should think only about Bhagavan. Also, we should breathe slowly and steadily.

When we do **Yoga** regularly, we become healthier and do not fall sick easily. We do not get sad or angry easily. If we do **Yoga** every day, we will find it easier to focus on our studies. **Yoga** makes us more intelligent and wise. It brings happiness in our heart, and we come closer to Bhagavan.

51.5 What is Yajna?

The fourth way of worshipping Bhagavan is doing a **Yajna**. A **Yajna** is a **Hindu** worship ceremony in which the worshippers and several priests gather around a pit (**kunda**) in which a fire is lit. Mantras are chanted by the priests. Ghee, grains, herbs and other items are offered into the fire at the same time. Hindus believe that Agni Devata, who commands fire, takes these offerings from the **yajna** to the **Devatas** in heaven. One way to understand this is that when we deposit money in our account in the USA, the bank 'wires' or transfers it to India, and a family member can withdraw it from there. Agni plays the role of the bank that 'wires' the offerings of the **yajna** from earth to heaven. A very important Devata who is worshipped in the **yajna** is 'Prajapati.' Most Hindus believe that Prajapati is the same person as Brahma.

The materials that we put into the kunda while doing the **yajna** make the air pure. When we breathe this pure air, it makes us healthier. People with problems like Asthma feel better when the do the **Yajna**. Some **Hindus** also believe that doing a **yajna** brings more rainfall.

51.6 Spiritual Benefits of Worshipping Bhagavān:

Worshipping Bhagavān is a great aid in becoming a good human being. Hindu scriptures declare that we can overpower our bad behaviors with the help of prayers

> Just as strong winds scatters dust from the earth and clouds in the sky, in the same manner, my evils are pushed away far from me by prayers and by God. **Atharvaveda 10.1.13**

51.7 Non-religious Benefits of Worshipping Bhagavān

Many Scientific studies show that worshipping and praying have many non-religious benefits on us as well. Some of these are listed below 0

1. It can prevent and reverse physical diseases like dementia.
2. It strengthens our mind, and improves our mental abilities like memory.
3. Helps fight negative emotions.
4. People who worship have a longer life-span and are generally happier.
5. Improves immunity to diseases.
6. Helps reduce stress.
7. Enhances our ability to show and experience love and compassion.

52. Study of Holy Scriptures:

52.1 Why should we study our Holy Books?

Some people think that studying our holy scriptures is a waste of time. They argue that these holy books were written several centuries ago and therefore they are outdated and useless. Some people think that they know everything and therefore do not need to study our holy scriptures. But according to Hinduism, there are many benefits of studying our scriptures as below –

1. The scriptures teach us how to attain all the four goals of our life – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha
2. They are the gold standard to help us decide what is good and what is bad.
3. They provide answers to some very difficult questions on Dharma and spirituality that we cannot find from other sources.
4. They contain the collected wisdom of thousands of Saints and Sages who lived across several millennia.
5. If we do not have the resources to give charity or perform sacred worship ceremonies, we can substitute them with reading of scriptures regularly.
6. When we read the excellent teachings of our scriptures, our mind becomes pure, and we do not want to commit evil actions.
7. Hindus believe that if we study our scriptures constantly, we come to remember our previous lives.
8. Study of scriptures helps us in pursuing our spiritual activities like meditation.
9. Recitation of scriptures has a soothing effect on minds, and benefits our physical health too.
10. We owe a debt to our Rishis who compiled these scriptures, which are a storehouse of all wisdom. We can repay their debt by studying our scriptures regularly.
11. Hindu scriptures also say that God is pleased when we chant the Vedas and other holy books.
12. It is good Karma to read and teach our scriptures to others.

The following story illustrates how the son-in-law of Sant Ekanath overcame his bad habits when he started paying attention to the teachings of the scripture called the Bhagavad Gita.

Story: Ekanath's son-in-law overcomes his bad habits with the help of Bhagavad Gita

Sant Eknath was a renowned saint of Maharashtra. He married his daughter to a famous scholar (Pandit) of the region. Unfortunately, this scholar fell into bad company. He started going out of his home late in the night, leaving his wife alone. Eknath's daughter became very worried about her husband's behavior and she spoke to her father about it.

Eknath then called his son in law and said, "Look here my son in law. You are a learned man, but my daughter is not. Do her a favor. Before you leave your home every night, please read to her a verse or two of the Bhagavad Gita. This will benefit her greatly. Then, you can go out wherever you please." The Pandit agreed. So every night before he stepped out, he would read a couple of verses of the Bhagavad

Gita to his wife, and explain the meaning to her. Slowly and slowly, the Pandit realized how beautiful the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita were. They started having an influence on how own mind. After some time, with the effect of the Gita, the Pandit stopped going out at the night. He had not intended to study the Gita for his own benefit. But nevertheless, the study of the holy book for the sake of his wife impacted him too in a positive way, and he became a virtuous man.

52.2 What are the Main Steps of Studying the Scriptures?

There are many steps to studying the scriptures:

1. Learning from a teacher (adhyayana)
2. Reciting them and reflecting upon their meaning alone (manana)
3. Teaching them to others (pravachana)
4. Practicing their teachings (vyavahaara)

Hinduism declares that our study of scriptures is complete ONLY when we complete all these four steps.

52.3 What are the Scriptures of Hindus?

- The holiest scriptures of the Hindus are the four Vedas namely Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. Hindus believe that Bhagavān Himself gave these scriptures to the Rishis, and subsequently, Rishi Veda Vyāsa compiled them into their present form. In the Vedas, there are certain parts called the Upanishads, which containing beautiful teachings about the nature of Brahman (the word used for God in these sections), the universe and the sou. The Vedas are very large scriptures (six times the length of the Bible) and their teachings are presented in a summary and systematic manner in the Bhagavad Gita, which is a dialog between Bhagavān Krishna and Arjuna.
- The Gita is a very popular scripture of the Hindus and it is actually a part of the Mahabharata, which has 100,000 verses and is the longest poem in the world. Another famous scripture is the Ramayana, which deals with the life of Sri Rama.
- Then, there are dozens (of which 18 are main) encyclopedic works which explain the teachings of the Vedas through hundreds of stories and examples – these works are called the Purāṇas and the most famous of these is the Shrimad Bhāgavata Purāṇa.
- The rules of conduct that we should observe in our daily lives are presented in a collection of scriptures called the Smritis of which the Manusmriti is the most famous.
- Then, we have works on philosophy of which six are the main ones. You will study more about Hindu scriptures in higher grades. At this point of time, we can just understand that so vast is the storehouse of wisdom in our Dharma that we have the largest collection of scriptures of all the religions in the world!

52.4 The Correct way of studying our Scriptures

The following stories illustrate the way in which we should study our Scriptures.

Story: Live the Scripture, not just Study it:

Studying the Bhagavad Gita is not an end in itself. Once, a man came to Swami Chinmayananda and said, "I have gone through the Gita fifteen times." Swami-ji asked, "***But has the Gita gone through you even once?***" The story below illustrates this message very aptly-

"While touring South India, Chaitanya encountered a certain Brahmin in the temple of Ranga-kshetra. This man daily sat in the temple turning over the pages of the Bhagavad-gita, but his constant mispronunciation of the Sanskrit made him the object of general mirth and derision. Chaitanya, however, observed signs of genuine spiritual ecstasy on the brahmin's body, and he asked him what he read in the Gita to induce such ecstasy. The brahmin replied that he didn't read anything. He was illiterate and could not understand Sanskrit. Nevertheless, his guru had ordered him to read the Gita daily, and he complied as best he could. He simply pictured Krishna and Arjuna together on the chariot, and this image of Krishna's merciful dealings with his devotee caused this ecstasy. Chaitanya embraced the Brahmin and declared that he was an "authority on reading the Bhagavad-gita."" [55]

Story: Study Scriptures not for Showing off your Knowledge, but for Self Transformation

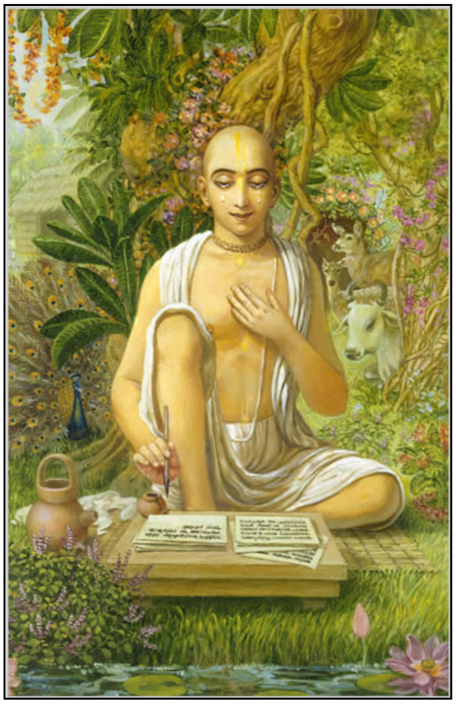
The story of Vamana Pandit below shows how mere learning of Gita and other scriptures does not benefit us spiritually. Our soul becomes 'alive' only when we give up our ego and pride, when our heart is filled with devotion, and when we are able to teach the scriptures to the common man in a simple language out of love and compassion.

> "Vāmana pundit was born in a Brahmin family of Bijapur, which was under Muslim rule. Even as a young boy he could compose Sanskrit verses. When the ruler Adil Shah heard of this child prodigy, he offered to support the boy if he embraced Islam, so the family sent him secretly to Varanasi to study under some scholars. After studying there for about twenty years, Vamana became quite famous for his knowledge and skill at debating. He used to go on tours and challenge other pundits to a debate. Hearing of Ramadasa, he decided to visit him a challenge him also to a debate. When he arrived near the place where Ramadasa was staying, Vamana pundit sent a messenger to get Ramadasa. Vamana waited and waited

[55] Rosen, Steven. 1988. *The Life and Times of Lord Chaitanya*. Folk Books: Brooklyn (New York). pp. 163-164

under a tree, but by midnight Ramadasa had still not come. At that time, he happened to see two ghosts, and overheard them talking about him. The ghosts were saying that Vamana would soon be joining them. Vamana pundit became very afraid. He thought about what the ghosts had said and gradually understood that his egotism and pride of scholarship was leading him to hell. In fact, he became so repentant that he decided he would approach Ramadasa for spiritual instructions.

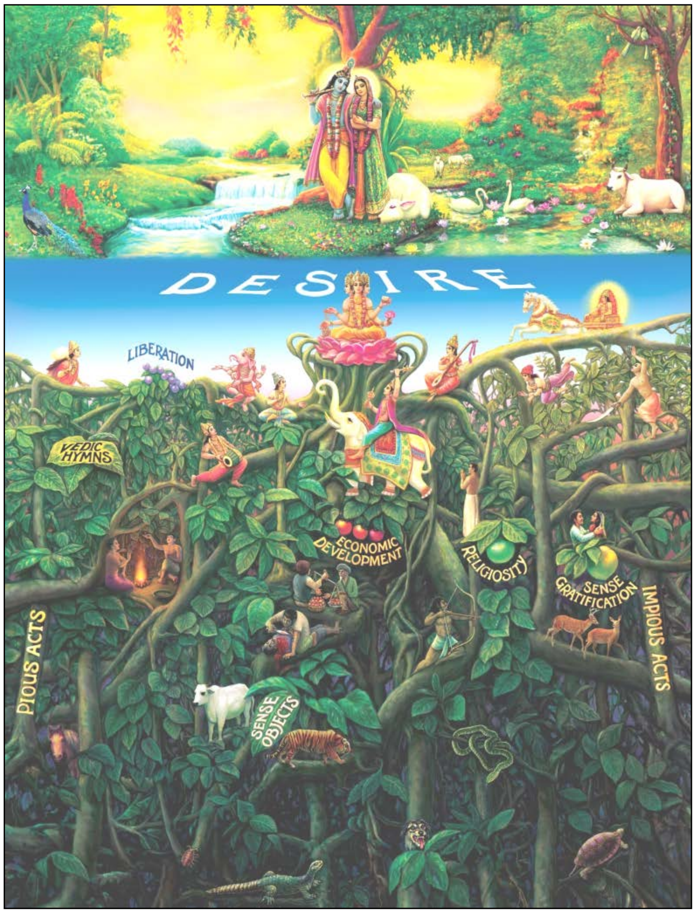
Soon after, at dawn, Ramadasa arrived and Vamana pundit bowed down at his feet. Ramadasa blessed the pundit and after giving him some spiritual instructions, told him to go to Badarika Ashrama, in the Himalayas, and meditate on Vishnu. After practicing sadhana whole-heartedly there for a long time, Vamana pundit had a vision of the Lord, who blessed him and told him to go back to Ramadasa for further instructions. When Vamana pundit met Ramadasa again, Ramadasa gave him more instructions and told him to go to Shri Shaila Hill to meditate on Shiva. Again Vamana did as he was told, practicing intense sadhana for several years. Here also he was blessed by the Lord and told to return to Ramadasa. This time (in 1668 CE) Ramadasa described to the pundit how the common man needed religious education in their own language. Thus far the pundit had written only in Sanskrit. His learning was learning only among other Brahmin pundits like himself. It was of no use to ordinary people. So Ramadasa requested Vamana pundit to write religious books in Marathi for the common people, and Vamana agreed. Besides some very beautiful poems, Vamana pundit also wrote a Marathi commentary on the Bhagavad-Gita, entitled Yathārtha Dīpikā."[56]



[56] Pravrajika Suddhatmaprana, pp. 199-200

53. Jnana: Spiritual Knowledge

53.1 What is our Relationship with Bhagavān?



This world is like an ocean and the endless air filled sky above it is like Brahman. We are like bubbles of air that is identical in properties to the air in the sky, but separated from the sky because we are located close to the sea bed. When at the bottom of the ocean, the bubble is in great darkness and pressure. But nothing can stop it from rising from the murky depths of the ocean to become one with the atmosphere above the ocean.

Hindu Dharma says that we human beings are souls that are like a small part of the Divine. We are separated from Brahman only temporarily, and will definitely become one with the Divine at the end. And because we are Divine, we are not weak. Rather, we are strong. We are not sinners, we are pure. We are not evil, we are virtuous.

Therefore, we must always think of ourselves in positive terms. Whenever we are in a sad or a difficult situation (e.g., before a mid-term), let us remember that we are not weak, we are not evil and we are not sinners. With our efforts, we will surely come out of it and succeed.

53.2 Nothing in this World is Permanent, except our soul and Bhagavān

Ups and Downs in our Life: The only thing constant in our life is change! We all go through good and bad times. Sometimes, we may become very rich, only to lose all our wealth later. Sometimes we are poor, and become wealthy after some time. We get excellent grades in a mid-term because we studied well, and poor grades in the next one. We may come across a wonderful person in our life who becomes our best friend in a short time. Or, we get betrayed by someone we thought to be our friend, and this causes us a lot of grief. We may even see our dear one die. But do any of these feelings of happiness, sadness, pain, pleasure etc. last forever? No! If we look carefully around us, we will conclude that no one, including ourselves, is always in a terrible situation, or always in a good situation.

The lesson to learn from this truth of life is that we should not get depressed or disheartened when we are passing through a bad time in our life. We should show patience. We should keep our spirits high. We should keep trying for a better tomorrow. We must not give up hope. Why? Because bad times will definitely pass away sometime and we will see good days again.

But there are two things that are permanent in this world – your own soul, and Bhagavān. In the Gita, Krishna says -

The soul is never born and it does not ever die. The soul is not something that exists at one time and then vanishes the next. The soul is not something that did not exist at one time and then took birth and came into being subsequently. It is unchanging, eternal and primeval and it is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. **Gita 2.20**

Weapons cannot cleave the soul, fire cannot burn it. Water does not wet (or drown) it not does wind dry it. **Gita 2.23**

We Never Die! When we die, it is only our body that dies, not our soul. Then where does the soul go? Krishna replies-

Just as a human casts off worn out clothing and puts on new, the soul too casts off old bodies and enters into new ones. **Gita 2.22**

Just as the soul dwelling in the body passes through childhood, youth and old age, in a similar manner, it travels from one body to another. Therefore, the wise do not get deluded over these changes. **Gita 2.13**

When the soul enters a body, it becomes the master of that body. And when it leaves the body (at death), it takes the mind and senses along with it, just as the wind takes fragrances from their sources (the flowers). **Gita 15.8**

53.3 Rebirth or Resurrection?

Followers of Abrahamic religions believe that we live only one life. After we die, we go to a permanent heaven or hell on the basis of our karma, and on whether we 'believed' in the dogmas of their religion or not. However, Hindu Dharma and Buddhism teach the doctrine of rebirth. Hindu Sages say that we are a Divine soul which has taken millions of births in the past, and will be reborn in another body after the death of the present one, till that soul becomes one with Brahman. Are bodies are just like a temporary garment that we wear, and differences of race, gender etc. are just superficial. In reality, we are very similar because we all have the same type of soul.

Evidence from modern science, medicine and parapsychology proves that the Hindu-Buddhist belief is the correct one. Many people have had 'Near-Death Experiences' (NDE), 'Out of Body Experiences', they have recalled their past life under deep hypnosis ('Past Life Regression'), or even spontaneously. Children remember things that they could not have been told, and people have spoken languages that are extinct for centuries. Due to this overwhelming evidence, more and more Abrahamic religion followers have started believing in the Hindu doctrine of rebirth.

53.4 Do not get perturbed by Momentary Things

When someone is able learn about his past lives, their entire perspective of their own current life changes. They are no longer shaken by temporary ups and downs in their lives. They no longer run after trivial pursuits like getting the latest cell phone, or the latest car or the latest video game all the time. This is because they understand that all these things are temporary – they did not exist in the past, and they will be super-ceded by newer things soon in the future. Instead, they start living their lives with a purpose – a higher purpose that involves being good to others, and being devoted to Bhagavān.

53.5 Go after the Permanent Thing – Your soul, and Bhagavān
Set your Priorities right!

This world keeps changing always but there is one thing that is permanent – our soul, because it is a part of the Divine. And yet, don't all of us spend 99% of our time running after temporary things – cars, electronics, good clothing, fame, wealth, a lofty mansion and so on. How much time do we spend to understand our soul, which alone is permanent, and which alone stays with us from one lifetime to another? Hardly any!

Therefore, we need to set our priorities right. We should make a greater effort to lead a spiritual life devoted to knowing and understanding our spiritual nature, and Bhagavān. There will come a time when all that we ran after throughout our life is left behind in this world. Only the good deeds we had done, and the spiritual wisdom we had acquired will accompany us. Therefore, let us resolve that as students, we will always, in addition to our school and college education, acquire a spiritual education and

understanding. Yes, you must work hard to be successful financially in your life, but not at the cost of losing the most precious things that you have – your character, and your soul.

Parable: Sage Jaigishavya Recalls his Past Lives

Through intense meditation, Sage Jaigishavya came to see all of his past lives, across billions of years. He saw that in some lives, he was human, in others, he was animal, and yet in others, he lived in heaven. But, nothing seemed permanent. He discovered that he had lived in multiple universes and had been born again, and had died millions of times. Sometimes, he had been happy, at other times, he was sad. But none of these states was permanent. However, his soul stayed the same in all these lives. Therefore, he realized that there was not much gain in getting excited over little things, or in getting upset over temporary setbacks. Instead, one must continue to make progress in their entire life despite temporary setbacks.

Another Sage named Avātya asked him, "So what will you consider the greatest source of happiness in all your lives?" Jaigishavya replied – "True happiness results not from indulging in all kinds of temporary pleasures, but by being a balanced person and being contented. And even greater happiness is being one with Brahman, because that alone brings complete and eternal joy."

Benefits of Understanding that we have an Eternal Soul

1. We start treating our body as the temple of our soul. Therefore, we take greater care of our body, and do not abuse it with bad habits like smoking and drinking.
2. We no longer fear or grieve over the death – whether of ourselves or of others.
3. We acquire greater understanding of the purpose and nature of our life – Who am I? Where did I come from? Is there a God?
4. We have a greater strength to withstand and accept unfortunate situations in our life. We have a greater understanding and appreciation of the ups and downs in life.
5. We acquire great self-confidence in fulfilling the purpose of our life. We are no longer scared by criticism and ridicule of others who are more materialistic people because we know that we are a soul that has a higher purpose.
6. We become more inclined towards eternal virtues like love, compassion, peace, service. Conversely, we are not easily overpowered by evils like anger, jealousy, and hatred and so on.
7. We are at peace with ourselves because no longer does everything appear to be 'chance' or 'luck', but a result of what we did, and what we can change in our future ourselves.
8. We become less enamored of trivial pursuits, and become more inclined towards the more substantial aspects of life – like spirituality and Dharmic living.

54. Constant Practice of Meditation

54.1 What is Meditation?

How do we keep our intellect pure when it is so difficult to control the mind? Practicing meditation regularly is a great tool to discipline our mind, and purify our intellect. Meditation aka Dhyana Yoga is a practice in which one masters the art of concentrating attention at will on our true nature.

I. The first step is to still the body.
II. Second to withdrawal from 5 senses
III. Third is inverting the attention on the third eye region
IV. Forth is to keep the attention there through repetition of a mantra mentally

Mind is like constantly flowing river. When you try to stop it, it finds it way around it. The very process of stopping the mind creates more waves in the mind and hence stopping it completely through the mind itself is impossible. For example, If one is asked not to think about an elephant. The mind will first think about an elephant. Through meditation and constant mental repetition of a name with love will have a tremendous calming effect on mind. A meditative mind will be calmer and more conducive for further meditation. Meditation is the process of stilling the body mind and attention. In the process of stilling the attention one gets inner experiences. These experiences open our hearts to wisdom and truth of life.

54.2 Non-Spiritual Benefits of Meditation

In addition, it also has several non-spiritual effects.

1. EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS: Ability to focus increases. Therefore, students can study more effectively.
2. MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS: A great cure against certain mental ailments like depression. Relaxes our mind and so we become more fit, cheerful and energetic.
3. PHYSICAL HEALTH BENEFITS: Calms our nerves, in turn lowers blood pressure and inflammation in our body. So there are several health benefits.
4. SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IMPROVE: The spiritual dimensions that we discover through yoga helps us put things in their proper perspective. This enables us to harmonize our social relationships.

5. PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS: Practitioners of Yoga have a higher self-confidence as a result of which they have the courage to take greater risks. This translates into higher levels of professional success.

Story: The Power of Meditation

One day a disciple found Swami Vivekananda turning over the pages of a volume so fast that he thought that the Swami must be looking merely at the pictures. He asked the Swami whether he was looking at the pictures in the book.

Swami Vivekananda replied, No, I am reading." The disciple said, "That requires attention, but you have been turning over the pages at the rate of a page per minute." The Swami then said, "No, I have been reading each page and have finished 11 volumes on the shelf. If you don't believe me you can ask me questions concerning any subject matter dealt with in the 11 volumes" The disciple then started putting questions and Swami Vivekananda answered all the questions correctly.

The disciple asked how it was possible for the Swami to read big volumes so quickly. Swami Vivekananda replied, "It is possible for a Yogi who has practiced meditation scrupulously. When a boy is reading, his attention is first fixed on the letters composing a word and he learns how to pronounce a word. With more practice, a man does not look at each separate letter or the word itself, and by such practice, a reader can read a few words together at the same time. Similarly, it is possible to take in a whole sentence at a time. But if a man who has absolute self-control concentrates his mind on the page, he can read a whole paragraph at one time; and later he will be capable of reading a whole page in this manner when the power of concentration increases as a result of regular practice of meditation."

55. Faith (Shraddhā)

55.1 What is Shraddhā?

Shraddha means that we should believe that Bhagavan takes care of us and can always see us. When we get into trouble, we should not get scared or start crying. We should think that Bhagavan will make our troubles go away because he is watching us and because he wants us to be happy.

Brahman is our Friend & the Final Refuge: A refuge is a place of safety where we seek shelter whenever we are in trouble or danger. There is a difference between a house and a shelter. For example, we are comfortable inside our home, but within our larger home, we have a 'tornado shelter' where we find refuge when there is a tornado siren. God is the supreme refuge that we should seek when we are in deep trouble, and when all other means to overcome our problems have failed. In addition, if we wish to attain Moksha, then we should give up all other refuges, and seek refuge in God alone. All other refuges are temporary and have limitations, but God is that refuge that is permanent and unfailing.

A true friend always helps us when we are in need of help without expecting anything in return and even if he is inconvenienced himself. He helps in a way that we do not feel uncomfortable and indebted to him. He stands up for us and supports us against bullies. A friend always tries to show the right path to his friend, taking him away from evil things and turning him towards the good. God is also our friend. In fact, God is our truest friend. All of our other friends may leave us behind one day, or betray us, or refuse to help us when we need it the most. But God looks after us unselfishly, and is constantly guiding all humanity to the right path always through saints, through scriptures and through our conscience. He has no need to and yet, he takes Divine Incarnations (Avataras) or appears Himself on this earth many times to re-establish Dharma, to defeat evil, and to set a good example for us. We only have to listen to his guidance, acknowledge it, follow it and extend our own hand back to him in friendship.

Having Bhagavān as our refuge and friend does not mean that we do not do our duty or that we do not put in our best effort. Rather, it means we should not worry about the results too much. We should instead focus on doing our studies and other tasks well, and then just leave the results in His hands. Bhagavān is loving and fair, and whatever he will give to us will be in accordance of our past karma. Therefore, we should not worry and instead we should keep a positive attitude in our life at all times.

The stories below from the Hindu tradition illustrate how faith is practiced and what its results are.

Story: The Faith of Arjuna

When the Pandavas were exiled in a forest, there rule was that they never ate any food that day till Arjuna had worshipped Shiva. One day as they were roaming in the forest, they could not find any Shivalinga to worship. Bhīma was feeling really hungry. Therefore, he just took a bowl, filled it with black soil and then inverted the heap of the soil on the ground. Calling Arjuna he said, "Brother, here is your Shivalinga. Now worship it so that we can eat our food."

Arjuna sat there on the ground and started worshipping Shiva with great devotion. He offered flowers and Bilva leaves and covered the Shivalinga with them. After some time, his worship was over. Bhīma laughed and said, "What you worshipped was merely a heap of black soil, not a Shivalinga." Saying this, he removed the leaves and flowers with his hands.

But a great surprise awaited him! Underneath the heap of the offerings, he found a stone Shivalinga. Bhīma understood what had happened – the faith and devotion of his brother Arjuna had transformed the heap of black soil into a black stone Shivalinga!

This Shivalinga is today worshipped in the Bhīmanātha Mahādeva temple in India.

Story: Faith in the Face of Death – Namadeva's Steadfastness in Dharma

Saint Namadeva was a Shudra, a cotton printer by caste, who lived in the Indian state of Maharashtra about 700 years ago. Once, he was forced to convert to Islam by the Muslim ruler Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1325 – 51 CE), who invaded the area in which Namadeva lived.

But Namadeva would not stop singing the names of Lord Vishnu. The Sultan was greatly enraged. He had a cow slaughtered and brought in front of Namadeva and asked him to bring back the cow to life, or risk his own throat get slit. Namadeva protested and said that no one can bring a dead creature back to life.

The Sultan got infuriated and had a mad elephant attack Namadeva. But when the elephant hit Namadeva's forehead with its trunk, it felt a great pain instead and fled away from Namadeva. The Saint was miraculously unhurt by the attack of the elephant. But the Sultan would not relent, and had Namadeva tied in chains and tortured. Yet, Namadeva would still not stop singing the names of Lord Vishnu. Namadeva's mother begged Namadeva to save his life by switching from singing the names of Lord Vishnu to reciting Islamic prayers. But Namadeva would not relent, and stood steadfast in his devotion to Lord Vishnu. After several hours, the chained and tortured Namadeva saw a vision of Lord Vishnu approaching him, seated on the Garuda.

Namadeva asked the Muslim ruler to have the calf of the slaughtered cow to be brought in front of the mother for suckling. The Sultan made fun of Namadeva, and to prove to Namadeva that his faith in Lord Vishnu was useless, he asked the calf to be brought in front of its dead mother anyway.

But a miracle happened. As soon as the calf came near, the cow became alive and milk started flowing out of its teats. The slaves of the Sultan filled an entire bucket with the milk and showed it to the Sultan, to prove that Namadeva had brought the cow back to life.

The Sultan was terrified when he saw the miracle of Namadeva. He asked Namadeva to forgive him. Namadeva asked the Sultan to give up cruelty and arrogance. All the Hindus gathered around Namadeva and praised him with a sigh of relief, and said that his glory will last forever. Namadeva is considered a Saint not just by Hindus, but also by Sikhs.

The Miracle of Shivarātri in Kashmir

Shivaratri is a festival that celebrates the wedding anniversary of Shiva and Parvati. It is the most important festival of Hindus in the valley of Kashmir in northern India. Here, Hindus celebrate the Shivaratri festival for 21 days during the month of Phalgun (in February-March). At that time of the year, Kashmir typically has snow, and therefore, traditional Kashmiri songs describe Shiva looking like a Prince when he walks through falling flakes of snow to marry Princess Parvati.

Unfortunately, about 200 years ago (i.e., in the early 19th cent.), Kashmir was ruled by an Afghan governor named Jabbar Khan. He was an extremely fanatical Muslim and hated the Kashmiri Hindus. When he learned that Kashmiri Hindus liked to sing songs to Shiva and describe the snowfall during His wedding, he came up with a plan to hurt the Hindus. He ordered that Hindus will no longer celebrate the festival during winter when it snows in Kashmir. Instead, they will celebrate it in June, the warmest month, when there is no snow.

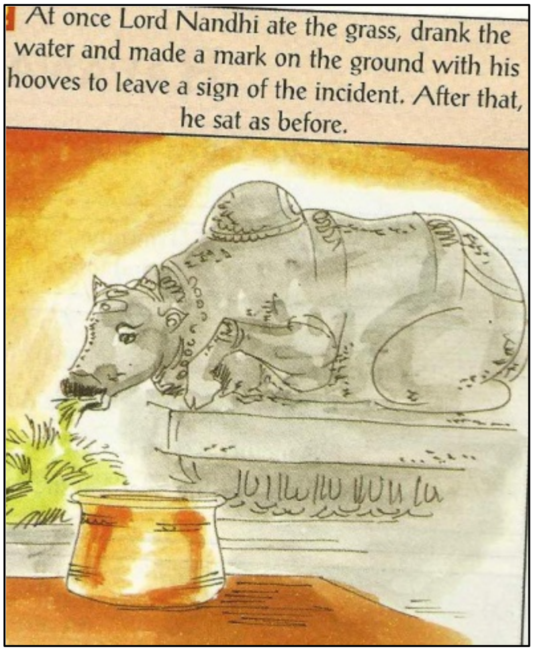
The Hindus were deeply hurt when they heard of the order because it had always snowed on Shivaratri every year. This year however, they would have to celebrate it during summer. But they had no choice. So, they prepared to celebrate the festival in the month of Aashaadha (June-July). Jabbar Khan thought that the Hindus will not celebrate the festival at all. But a miracle happened! The day in summer when the Kashmiri Hindus were celebrating the festival, there was a sudden blizzard in Kashmir. Snow in June was unheard of in Kashmir. Jabbar Khan was terrified to witness the wrath of Shiva. The blizzard was a miracle, and

caused utter surprise ('Hairat') due to which Shivaratri is even today called by the name 'Hairat' in Kashmir. 'Hairat' is a word in the Persian language and it means 'utter surprise.'

The unseasonal snow destroyed the summer crops in Kashmir. Due to the misery that the fanaticism of Jabbar Khan had caused, all the people of Kashmir, whether they were Hindus or Muslims, cursed him. After some time, finally fed up of his oppression, a few Hindus went to appeal to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh Emperor of Punjab, to invade their land and free them from the Afghan rule. With their help, the Sikh forces drove out the Afghans from Kashmir, and Jabbar Khan himself barely fled with his life, in tattered rags.

Story: When the Mūrti of Nandi ate Grass

In the city of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, there is a famous Shiva Mandir called Thanthondreesvara. Like all Shiva Mandirs, a stone Mūrti of Nandi is at the entrance, facing the Shivalinga. Several hundred years ago, European invaders occupied Jaffna. The Europeans sometimes forced Hindus to convert to Christianity. They also destroyed many Hindu Mandirs and built Churches in their place.



One day, a European army commander entered the Shiva Mandir with his shoes on. He asked the priest rudely, "Why do you have a stone bull sitting in your Mandir?" The priest replied, "This is no ordinary bull. It is Nandi, the bull of Shiva. It is here to guard the Mandir."

The commander laughed, "Can this bull eat grass? If not, then how can it even protect the Mandir?" The priest replied, "Of course, it can eat grass." The commander said, "I will come tomorrow with some cannons. If your bull does not eat grass, then I will blow away your Mandir with my cannons."

The priest went home and told about the threat from the European commander to his wife. She said, "Pray to Shiva. He will surely suggest a way out to us." When the priest was sleeping that night, Shiva came to him in a dream and said, "Do not worry. Tomorrow morning when that commander comes, put some grass in front of Nandi, and offer it some water."

The next morning, when the commander arrived, he reminded the priest that if the stone bull does not eat grass, then he will destroy the Mandir and force Hindus to become Christians. The priest said a prayer to Shiva. Then, he placed some grass in front of the Nandi Mūrti and offered it some water in a pitcher.

A miracle happened. The Nandi Mūrti bent its neck and stretched out its leg to leave a mark on the ground. Then, the stone Mūrti started eating grass and drinking water. When the European commander saw that, he was terrified! He apologized to the priest, and to Shiva. He asked the cannons to be taken back. The priest and all the other Hindus present there thanked Shiva and Nandi, and sang their praises.

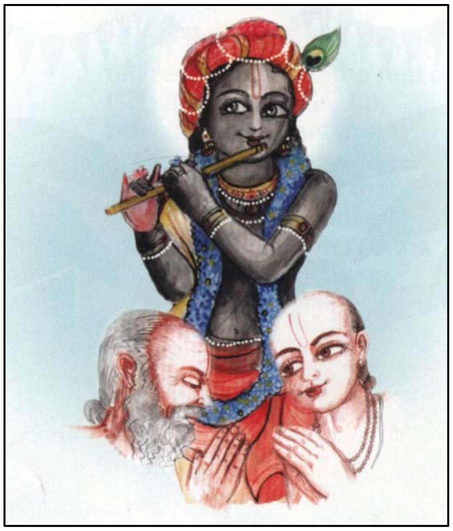
Story: When Krishna appeared as a Witness – the Mandir of Sākshī Gopāl

Several centuries ago, in a village in the Indian state of Odisha, there lived a couple Raghavaiyya and Radhabai, and their daughter Vasanthi who was in love with Mahendra, a poor but a noble boy from the same village. However, Vasanthi's father wanted her to marry a rich man named Sukaveera. Once, Sukaveera and Raghavaiya went to the city nearby to celebrate a temple festival. But on the way, Raghavaiya caught small-pox, a very contagious disease that can cause death. Sukaveera and other companions left Raghavaiya, saying that they did not want to catch the disease from him.

While Raghavaiya was suffering alone, Mahendra happened to pass that way. When he saw his beloved Vasanthi's father suffering, he decided to stay back and nurse Raghavaiya back to good health. Under his care, Raghavaiya overcame small-pox. He was very impressed by the selfless love of Mahendra and promised to marry Vasanthi to him once he reached his village back.

However, when Raghavaiya returned to the village, a wedding proposal for Vasanthi came from Sukaveera. Raghavaiya forgot all about the selfless love of Mahendra and the fact that he owed his very life to the service and care provided by the latter. He immediately agreed to Sukaveera's wedding proposal. When Mahendra heard about this, he was heartbroken. He called a meeting of the village elders and claimed that Raghavaiya had gone back on his word that he will marry his daughter Vasanthi to Mahendra. The village elders demanded proof for the promise, and asked Mahendra to produce witnesses.

Mahendra was now in a fix because the promise had been made when he was alone with Raghavaiya. He went to a Mandir of Krishna and cried his heart out. Very depressed and stressed out, he fell asleep. Bhagavān Krishna appeared to him in his dream and said, "Mahendra, you are a very good man and your love for Vasanthi and her family is pure. Go and tell the village elders that I, Krishna, will come as your witness because I did hear Raghavaiya make this promise to you. I will follow you to the village, but you have to make one promise – that you will never look back when I follow you. Trust me that I will come with you and never look back in doubt."



Mahendra woke up very happy and he started walking back towards the village. As he took his steps, he could hear the jingling sound of anklets of a man following him. However, at a little distance from the village, the sound became silent. Mahendra panicked and he turned around, only to discover that in place of Krishna, there was a beautiful and a large mūrti of Him.

Mahendra rushed to the village and related what had happened. Everyone rushed to the spot and found that suddenly, a beautiful Mūrti of Krishna had appeared at the spot. Moved by the miracle, Raghavaiya confessed to his guilt, and married his daughter to Mahendra.

A beautiful Mandir was constructed to house the Mūrti. Even today, numerous Hindus visit this Mandir of Sākshī Gopāla (i.e., Gopāla or Krishna who is Sākshī of witness) located between the great religious cities of Puri and Bhuvaneswar.

The message of this story is that Bhagavān indeed witnesses whatever we do, even if there is no one else around. Also, Bhagavān goes out of the way to protect his truthful and loving Bhaktas (devotees). We only need to have faith in Him.

56. Bhakti or Devotion to Bhagavān

56.1 The Meaning of Bhakti

The word Bhakti means loving Bhagavan like you love a friend, a brother or sister, and respecting Him like you respect your mother and father.

Our parents gave birth to us. They look after us. They love us. Therefore, we love our parents.

Our brothers and sisters love us. They help us in many different ways. Therefore we love them.

Our friends like us and we like them. They play with us. They share their things with us. Therefore, we love our friends.

Bhagavan gives birth to us and takes care of us all the time like our parents. Bhagavan loves us and has given us many, many gifts, like the sun, the moon and the earth. Bhagavan shares his world with us. Therefore, we should also love Bhagavan. Loving Bhagavan is called 'Bhakti'. When we love Bhagavan, we become his 'Bhaktas'.

56.2 For a True Bhakta, nothing is dearer than Bhagavān

We illustrate this with the example of two stories.

Story: Hanuman Looks for Ram inside Precious Pearls

After the coronation ceremony of King Rama in Ayodhya was over, Shri Rama received a lot of expensive presents from other rulers of the world. He distributed this presents, which included precious pearls, diamonds, gems etc., to his friends – the Vanaras, King Vibhishana of Lanka and others who had helped him defeat Ravana.

Hanuman was gifted a necklace of very rare and precious pearls. Everyone was overjoyed upon receiving their gifts. They started comparing their own gifts with those of others, and there was a lot of excitement in the air.

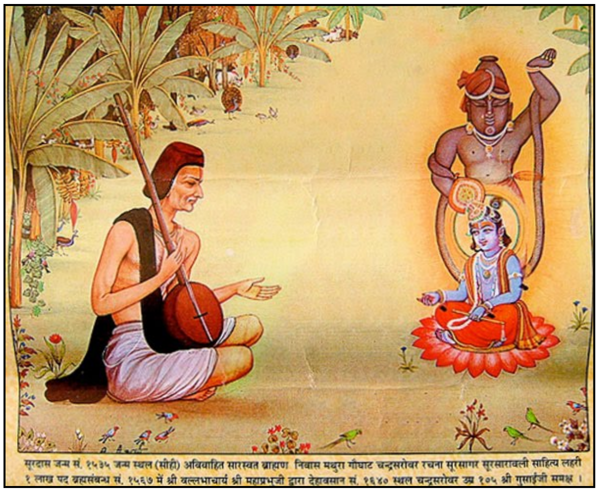
Suddenly, someone noticed that Hanuman was sitting in a corner. He was biting the pearls of the necklace, one by one, and then discarding the pieces in a heap of trash. When asked to explain his strange action of destroying the necklace of expensive pearls, he replied, "The only thing I value is my Lord Shri Rama. I do not find him inside these pearls. Therefore, they are worthless for me."

Story: Sūrdās asks Krishna to make him Blind:

Sant Surdas lived in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in the 15-16th cent CE. It is believed that he was born blind. Surdas was greatly devoted to Bhagawan Krishna. Every day, he composed hymns in praise of Krishna, and sang them melodiously. One day, he fell into a well. He sang out to Krishna. Miraculously, a couple appeared soon and pulled him out of the well.

Surdas realized that the couple was none other than Radha and Krishna. Moved by the devotion of Surdas, Radha came back to see Surdas, who immediately caught her feet to get her blessings. Radha was able to get away, but in the process, her anklets fell off. She asked Surdas to return them, but he insisted, “How do I know they are yours because I cannot see.”

Radha restored his vision, and at once, he saw none other than Bhagawan Krishna and Radha in front of him. Krishna requested Surdas to ask for some boons because He was very pleased with the devotion of the saint.



But Surdas asked for only one thing – “Please make me blind again. I have seen my Lord with my own eyes. And now I do not wish to see anything else.” Krishna insisted that this would be unfair to Surdas. He could keep his vision and also ask for something else. But Surdas insisted – “No, please make me blind again. But give me the boon that I always remain devoted to you as your servant.”

56.3 How can we show our love (Bhakti) to Bhagavan?

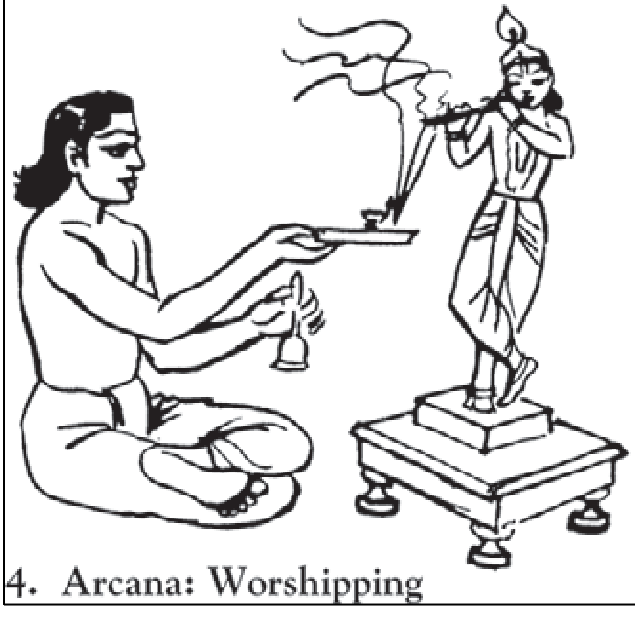
There are many ways in which we can show our love for Bhagavan. Some of these ways are:

1. Listening to stories about Him.
2. Chanting and singing prayers to Him.
3. By remembering Him in our heart every day.
4. By worshipping Him in our home or in the Mandir regularly.
5. By serving His feet.
6. By praising Him.
7. Serving Him like a servant.
8. Thinking of Him like a friend. Whenever we need help, we should talk to Bhagavan in our heart like a friend.
9. When we are in deep trouble, and nothing works, then we should just say to him – “Now only You can help me. I am leaving everything in Your hands.”

1. Śravaṇa: Listening

2. Kīrtana: Singing

3. Smaraṇa: Remembering



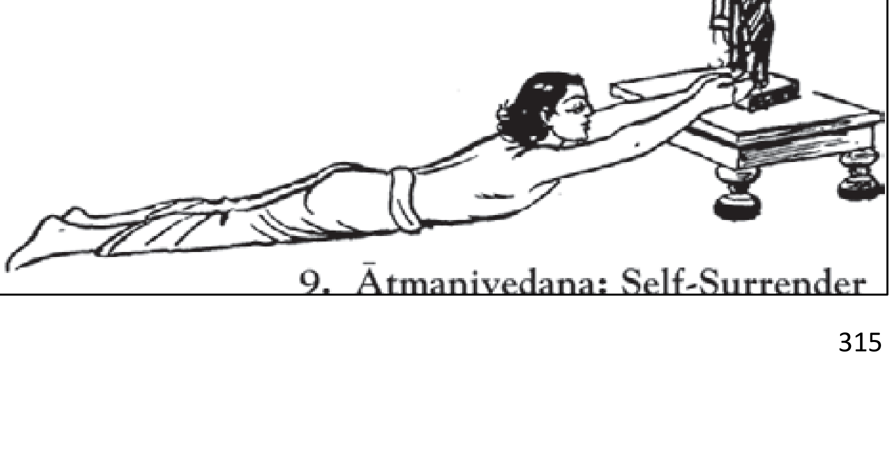
4. Arcana: Worshipping

5. Pādasevana: Serving

6. Vandana: Praising

7. Dāsya: Servitude

8. Sakhya: Companionship



9. Ātmanivedana: Self-Surrender

56.4 True Bhakti is Not in Worship alone but in seeing Bhagavān everywhere

Story: God turns to see his disciple Kanakadasa (1509-1609 CE)

Kanaka Dasa was a humble cowherd who wandered from village to village singing the praises of Bhagawan Vishnu. Vyasateertha, a very famous scholar of Vedanta, took him as his student. Very soon, Kanakadasa became his favorite student.

The other students became jealous, because unlike them, Kanaka was not only from a very humble family; he was also not educated in scriptures. Vyasateertha decided to teach his students a lesson. He called all of them and gave them a banana each saying, “These are sacred bananas. If you eat them, you will be blessed. However, you must eat your banana in a secluded spot where no one can see you. Then come back and tell me where you had eaten your banana.”

After a day or so, everyone came back and reported that they had eaten their blessed banana at such and such spot. Surprisingly, Kanaka had still not eaten his banana. When Vyasateertha asked, Kanaka responded, “Reverend teacher, I was not able to find a single spot where God could not see me.”

Vyasateertha looked at his students and said, “For you, God is merely something whose name is chanted by you in rituals. But for Kanakadasa, God is a real, living and breathing person whom he experiences everywhere.”

After sometime, Kanakadasa decided to start roaming again to sing the praises of Vishnu. One day, he arrived at the famous Krishna temple at Udipi, a town in the Indian state of Karnataka. It had been his desire for a long time to have a darshana of Lord Krishna at the temple.

Unfortunately, the priests refused him entry, saying that he was a low caste cowherd and therefore he could not enter the temple. Disheartened, Kanakadasa went to the rear wall of the temple and started worshipping Krishna from there. While the priest was chanting his Sanskrit prayers to Krishna inside, he saw a miracle happen. The Murti of the Lord started turning around. A hole appeared in the rear wall, and the face of the Murti gazed at Kanakadasa worshipping outside! Quite clearly, Krishna turned his back at the priest who had turned away his gentle and loving devotee Kanakadasa.

A window was later inserted into the hole through which Kanakadasa had a darshana of Krishna, and this window, which exists even today, is called Kanakana Kindi in honor of the saint. Even today, devotees have a Darshana of Krishna through this window. The story of Kanakadasa shows how a devotee always experiences God and knows that God sees him at all times. Likewise, God too always keeps an eye on his devotee who always sees Him.

56.5 The Characteristics of the Best Bhakta

Sage Markandeya asked Sri Vishnu, the Blessed Lord:

How is the appearance of the devotees of God? By which great acts is their identity revealed? My heart is anxious to know this my Lord, and I want to satisfy my enquiry by hearing the reply from You alone. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.48**

Sri Vishnu, the Blessed Lord replied:

O best amongst ascetics! If you desire to know the qualities of the devotees of God, I shall expound them to you. But believe me, such is the glory of my devotees that it cannot be described even in millions of years. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.49**

They who are always busy in the welfare of other creatures, who are free of jealousy and do not feel upset when others progress, who are self-restrained, who never quarrel with others and love peace- these are the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.50**

My devotees never hurt others by the actions, by their words or even in their thoughts. They do not hoard or accept charity from others (when they can live within their own means). **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.51**

They those minds are pure and are ever engaged in listening the sacred stories from the scriptures, and they who serve other devotees of Vishnu- they indeed are the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.52**

They who serve their mother and their father thinking of them as the holy Ganges river and as Lord Shiva themselves- these are truly the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.53**

They who ever worship the gods, and perform austerities as time avails; they who always support such activities when performed by others- these are the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.54**

Know them to be the best devotees of God, whose lives are engaged in the service of monks and ascetics, and who never criticize others without cause. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.55**

Those gem amongst men, who always speak words that will cause benefit to others and who accumulate good qualities from all - these indeed are the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.56**

The true devotees of God consider everyone else as their own self, and do not distinguish between friend and foe but treat both with love and without malice. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.57**

They who always expound the scriptures for benefit of others, and always speak the truth; they who serve pious men diligently- these indeed are the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.58**

They who serve the cow and Brahmins and go for pilgrimages- these are the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.60**

The true devotees recite the praises of Hari (=the God who takes away our sins and sorrows) and feel elated when they see others progress and prosper. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.61**

They, who lay out gardens (so that the birds and butterflies may live happily), get ponds and wells dug so that others may benefit- these are the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.51.62**

The true devotees of God get temples and lakes constructed, and regularly meditate upon the Gayatri mantra. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.62**

In whatever stage of life they are, they who welcome guests at all times and serve them, and they who explain the meanings of the Vedas to others- these indeed are the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.67**

They who distribute alms by organizing the sacred rituals, and worship Lord Shiva or Lord Vishnu- these indeed are the best devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.70**

They who study hard to understand the teachings of all scriptures, and then try to explain them to others; they who try to acquire good habits at all times- these indeed are the true devotees of God. **Nārada Purāṇa 1.5.71**

APPENDIX I

The following list of great Hindus may be used by students to do research on their lives:

Great Sages: Valmiki, Vishvamitra, Vyasa, Vashishtha, Agastya, Yajnavalkya

Great Saints: Tulsidas, Meerabai, Surdas, Pipa, Dhanna, Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, Lalleshwari, Shankar Dev, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Narsi Mehta, Namadev, Jnaneshvar, Tukaram, Ekanath, Basavanna, Akka Mahadevi, Andal, Nammalvar, Appar, Jnanasambandhar, Bhadrachalam Ramadas, Kabir, Jhuelal, Satguru Shivaya Sunbramania Swami, Swami Chinmayananda, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi, Dadu, Mahamati Prannath, Mata Anandamoyi, Ramaprasad Sen, Vidyapati

Great Acharyas: Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Vallabhacharya, Nimbarkacharya, Vallabhacharya

Great Kings and Queens: Rani Lakshmibai, Rani Durgavati, Rani Ahilyabai Holkar, Rana Pratap, Chhatrapati Shivaji, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Raja Chhatrasal, Raja Krishna Deva Raya, Prithviraj Chauhan, Maharaja Vikramaditya, Harshavardhan, Lalitaditya, Chandragupta Maurya, Maharaja Janaka

Great Scientists, Physicians and Mathematicians: Bhaskara, Brahmagupta, Aryabhatta, Varahamihira, Charaka, Sushruta, Vagbhatta

Great Scholars, Politicians and Poets: Panini, Chanakya, Kalidasa, Mahatma Gandhi

Social Reformers: Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishvarachandra Vidyasagar, Maharshi Karve

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